

Salvation History

© Geoffrey Bingham

Salvation History

INDEX TO STUDIES

	Page No.
1. Introduction to Salvation History	1
2. Man, the Fall, and the Flood	5
3. Families: Babel and Abraham	8
4. Israel, Egypt and the Exodus	11
5. Israel: The Judges and Samuel	14
6. Israel and the Monarchy ..	17
7. Israel: The Prophets and the Exile	21
8. Israel, the Return, the Inter-Testamental Period	25
9. Gospel History I - Jesus and the Ministry	30
10. Gospel History II - Jesus and the End Events	34
11. The Holy Spirit and the Early Church - Pentecost: Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles	35
12. The Holy Spirit and the Early Church II - Paul and the New Churches	40
13. The Church, the Epistles, and the Plan of God	43
14. The Things of the Revelation: History Outworking ..	46
15. The End Things: The Parousia, Judgement, God's People	50
16. Review of Salvation History	54
Questions for Use in Groups or Personal Study	58

– *STUDY ONE* –

INTRODUCTION TO SALVATION HISTORY

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'salvation history' is here used in a non-technical manner. It simply means, 'History from beginning to end. Events chronicled as they happened, all being understood, in the ultimate, to refer to God's purpose of salvation for man and His universe.' In other words, anyone reading the Scriptures from beginning to end - especially if he were to read them many times, and with increasing knowledge - would understand that history, as the Bible tells it, is simply the acts of God, and these are all with a view to fulfilling God's purposes of salvation.

Much of history, of course, does not seem immediately or directly related to salvation. That is only because we take a specialised or particularistic view of salvation. As we shall see, God's intention, before the foundation of the world, was that it should climax just as He wished, and so nothing happens in a careless, loose or haphazard fashion, although, of course it often appears to be this way.

The term 'Salvation History' is used by some scholars in a technical manner. They mean by this term either, (a) The history of salvation takes place in a supra-historical sphere, which cannot be researched after a secular manner. (In fact, it is accessible only to faith. It is the opposite to objective historicity.) Or, (b) God's salvation is connected with real historical events which have been witnessed, and which can be interpreted, once given the key that history relates to revelation and salvation. Faith is still needed to understand and interpret the events which stretch from before creation to the ultimate new creation, when history as we know it will have been sealed off. That history has a beginning and an end, is of course indicated Biblically, but is only acceptable to faith.

2. VARIOUS SCHEMES OF SALVATION HISTORY

What we are going to do is simply trace the Bible history of events from Genesis to Revelation, seeking to put these events in their right sequence, and to understand them a little as we go. We hope also - on the way - to see how they are all part of the plan of God.

We will see then, that the Bible was not written to be merely the chronicling of events, but the *purposive* chronicling of these events. In fact only the events which matter are chronicled. The writers of some books had other books on which to draw, but they only used them in accordance with the principle of showing significant events. Many other events may have had more personal interest, and more stimulating action, but they were not needed to produce salvation history.

Because many have read the Bible with deep understanding, they have produced their patterns of Bible history as they see it. Some of these we append below.

It will be good to see these before we set out to do our own reading and study.

(i) The Seven-Epochs History

(a) Adam and Eden. (b) Noah and the Flood. (c) Abraham and the Covenant. (d) Moses and the Exodus. (e) Israel and the Exile. (f) Christ and His Life and Death. (g) The End-Time, and Its Things.

(ii) The Kingdom Salvation History

(a) The Kingdom of Creation. (b) Man's Loss of the Kingdom. (c) Israel and the Kingdom. (d) Christ and the Kingdom. (e) The Ultimate Triumph of the Kingdom.

(iii) History and the People of God

(a) Man created. (b) *Man* Fallen and Judged. (c) Abraham, Covenant, and the True People of God. (d) God's People - Israel. (e) Christ and His People: Pentecost and the New People of God. (f) The End: God and His True People Are One.

(iv) Salvation History - The Glory of God

(a) God's Glory in Creation. (b) Man and the Loss of Glory - The Fall and the Judgement of the Flood. (c) Abraham and Israel: The Glory of God in Covenantal Redemption. (d) Christ and the Glory of God: Redemptional Glory. (e) Glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus. (f) Universal Glory: Man Restored, and God Glorified in the End Things.

There are other schemes, too, some of which will be incorporated as we proceed. One caution needs to be given. It is this, that whilst two distinctive epochs seem to exist in what we call the Old and New Testaments, yet in fact all *history* - at least from God's point of view - *is one epoch*. Otherwise we are likely to fall into the error into which some have come, namely that God is different, in different epochs. However, He is the same, 'Yesterday, and today, and for ever.' It is simply that His plan unfolds, more and more, in and through each epoch. Whilst without doubt there are epochs or dispensations within history, we should be wary of any system which makes God the God of law in one epoch and the God of grace in another. God is always the God of law and the God of grace.

3. SALVATION HISTORY - PLAN FOR STUDY

The following constitutes the pattern we will follow in our studies:-

- I. Introduction: Creation.
- II. Man: the Fall and the Flood.
- III. Families: Babel and Abraham.
- IV. Israel, Egypt and the Exodus.
- V. Israel: Judges and Samuel.
- VI. Israel and the Monarchy.
- VII. Israel, the Prophets, the Exile.
- VIII. Israel, the Return, the Inter-Testamental Period.
- IX. Gospel History I: Jesus and the Ministry.

- X. Gospel History II: Jesus and the End-Events.
- XI. The Holy Spirit and the Early Church I: Pentecost: Jews,
- XII. Samaritans and Gentiles. The Holy Spirit and the Early Church II: Paul and the New
- XIII. Churches– The Church, the Epistles, and the Plan of God.
- XIV. The Things of the Revelation: History Outworking.
- XV. The End Things: The Parousia, Judgement, God's People.
- XVI. Review of Salvation History.

4. SECTION ONE OF SALVATION HISTORY: THE CREATION

Note:- As we describe the events which constitute salvation history we will seek to *interpret* them as little as possible. Nevertheless where Scripture offers some interpretation, we will seek to incorporate this.

(i) The Fact of Creation

Creation is the first act of God in the history of time. Whilst some Scriptures tell us that God planned beforehand what the end of creation would be, the *fact* of creation is essential to salvation history. Creation is mentioned many times in the Bible, either explicitly or implicitly. References are:- Isaiah 40:26, 28, 42:5, 44:24, Jeremiah 10:12-16, Amos 4:13, Psalms 33:6, 9, 90:2, 102: 25, Job 38:4ff, Jeremiah 9:6, John 1:1ff, Acts 17:24, Romans 1:20, 25, 11:36, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2, 11:3, Revelation 4:11, 10:6.

Hebrews 11:3 tells us that 'By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.' It indicates that understanding the meaning, purposes, etc. of creation is by *faith*. Nevertheless the events of creation are stated clearly enough. They are as follows, with their Biblical sequence:-

On *day one* (whether the day was of 24 hours or a period of time), the earth was without form, and was void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. God created out of 'the things which do not appear' the earth and the waters prior to the first day, but on the first day He created *light*. Note not 'lights' (v. 14) which come at a later period. Night and day at this time are not dependent upon luminaries, as such. Darkness was not created, it already being there. On *day two*, the vault of heaven was created, water being below and above. On *day three*, the water on the earth was heaped together, whilst dry land appeared. Vegetation was created. On *day four*, the luminaries of sun and moon appear, as also the stars. Sun and moon were to *rule* by day and night. On *day five*, the birds were created, and on *day six*, fishes, animals, and man. The verb *bara* (Heb.) is used of a creative act out of 'nothing' (Heb. 11:3 'do not appear'), so that the heavens and the earth, and the fishes are created this way, whilst the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and man are all created out of the earth. Yet *bara* is used in another sense in 1:27 of man.

(ii) The Meaning of Creation

In salvation history we say that we cannot understand the end apart from the beginning, and all other events which precede it. Likewise, we cannot understand the beginning apart from the end, and all other events which follow it. We cannot understand man fully until the very end, yet the fact of his fall has no significance until we understand his creation and the Creator.

Hence, creation is described with a view to the Fall, the Flood, Abraham, and so on, right up to the new creation. At the same time, the Biblical teaching of creation opposes the non-Biblical systems of 'creation'. I Peter 4:19 speaks of God as a faithful Creator; Acts 17:24f, describes Him as benevolent, providential and purposeful in His creation. Isaiah 44:24 shows that *God alone* creates. Ecclesiastes 12:1 points out that creation continues - 'Him who created you'. Ephesians 4:6 shows that there is one God and Father of us all, He being above all, through all, in all, i.e., not being locked out of or into His creation. Other Scriptures show us that the work of creation was Triune, Father, Son and Spirit working in it (cf. Gen. 1:1, Isa. 44:24, Psalm 33:6, John 1:3, Psalm 104:30).

The *immediate meaning* of creation is shown (a) In God creating man specially in His own image (Gen. 1:26ff), end (b) In giving him command as to what he is to do (Gen. 1:28ff, cf. 2:17). The *long-term meaning* is found in many other places such as Ephes. 1:4ff, Isa. 43:6-7, I Cor. 2:6ff, etc.

The purpose of the *account* of creation is to give us understanding of the nature of God; the nature of the world in which we live; the nature of man end the general purposes of creation. This is seen in that each day, as God creates, He says it is *good*, and on the last day of creation that it is *very good* meaning that there is no flaw in it, and that all constitutes an ordered, functional whole. *No accusation of any flaw or weakness in creation* may be brought against God.

(iii) The Purpose of Creation

'By faith we understand that the world was framed by the word of God', tells us that we understand the matter of creation, not scientifically, as such, but by faith. Not that the two are necessarily opposed, but offer different *modes* of understanding the creation. The creation is here - that is a fact! When God says, of His creation, 'It is very good', this must surely mean it is good for the purposes for which He created it. Passages such as I Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3 and 2:10 show that creation is utterly contingent upon God (cf. Psalm 104:29). They also show that He has created and sustains creation for a purpose. It is obvious from Ephesians 1:4-14 that this is to fulfil His own will. Later we will see that this is to redeem fallen man, and renew the entire creation, and to bring man, as His family, into His presence. More than that we need not say. However, what we say relates to the *modes* by which man is created. Psalm 8:3f, cf. Heb. 2:5f, Eccles. 7:29, 3:11, show that man is created to be above the rest of the creation; that he is to rule, and serve God. This accords with Gen. 1:28ff. Hence creation and its purpose must be understood. Both the 'How?' and the 'Why?' of creation are intimately related.

(iv) Conclusion on Creation

In our next study we will see how the modes of creation relate to what a man is, and God's purpose for him. We conclude simply, that as we read the account of creation, the purpose of the writer is not to satisfy our curiosity as to the world's beginnings, but to open the story of God's divine dealings. In this order it is entirely satisfactory. It is neither a story in some 'cuckoo-cloud' realm of myth or fancy, anymore then it is an empirical scientific description of the beginning of the universe. In fact, it is the opening phase of the Scriptures' great story of salvation history.

.... oo0oo

-- STUDY TWO --

MAN, THE FALL, AND THE FLOOD

1. HOW WE UNDERSTAND MAN

'Let us make man in our own image' must refer (a) To God in a plural sense. We saw that the Father, Son and Spirit worked together in creation. The idea that man was made in the image of angels is to be rejected. (b) Man must have close affinity with God. He is special in creation. It is after he is created that God says, of all creation, 'It is very good.' Also man is to work with God, and under God. He is to be purposive. Two accounts of him (Genesis 1 account and Genesis 2 account) need not be thought of as varying, but as complementary. They both show him to be distinctive in the creative order. Man appears to contain, at the first, both elements of masculinity and femininity. Woman is made from man, as no other mate is derived from its head. Rightly speaking, man is provided with all he needs. He is to be practical and purposive. It is suggested that the mention of metals in Gen. 2:11-12 is a provision for industrial living.

2. THE FALL OF MAN

One element of true humanity is its dependency upon God, that is, man is truly man only when he depends upon the Creator. That is the essence of his creaturehood. Woman is dependent upon man, and must refer to him (cf. I Tim. 2: 13-14).

The account in Genesis 3 shows that man ceased to depend upon God. Eve is tempted by the serpent. Deceived, she eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man is not deceived, but deliberately seeks to be 'as God', and meets the death against which he was warned. This death, not immediately physical, is one of relationships. Man, in seeking to live for himself, dies to God (cf. II Cor. 5:15). Man is now in a different relationship to God - one of fear, and one in which God begins to execute a form of judgement. Romans 5:12ff shows that this fall of man was universal - all men being involved in the decision against God.

3. THE FRUITS OF THE FALL

Man is banished from the garden of Eden, sometimes referred to as Paradise. Ezekiel 28 should be read in this respect. The tree of life which was for man's use had he chosen to use it, is now forbidden to him, and man may not return to the garden. The serpent, who is in fact evil (cf. Rev. 12:10ff), has his ultimate destruction foretold. In Gen. 3:15 the first prophecy in salvation history is given, in partially-veiled terms.

Children are born to Eve, the first two being Cain and Abel, in that order. Cain kills Abel out of jealousy. Later Scripture tells us that Abel was a prophet, and was killed because he was such. Other Scriptures speak of prophets 'which have been since the world began', so we see that salvation history is in

the acting and the making. The godly Abel is replaced by another child, the godly Seth. Genesis 5 describes the godly line of Seth (Gen. 4:17-24 describes the ungodly line of Cain), and in Genesis 6 the effects of the Fall are shown to be terrible.

Controversy has resulted from varying views of Genesis 6:1-4. The first is that angels cohabited with human females, and as a result a new breed of humans emerged, called Nephilim, and they were giants. The second is that the account of Cain and Seth's posterity is completed when it is shown that Cain's male descendants married the female descendants of Seth, the result being that man becomes 'flesh', that is, has descended to materialistic living. The Nephilim were not so much renowned for being great in the sense of true greatness, as they were tyrants, 'men of a name' (cf. Gen. 11:4). There is a third view that 'sons of God' means 'sons of the gods' who were pagan tyrants, taking women, as and when they wished, and cohabiting without morals. In any case, man's plight is shown to be immoral and evil. Gen. 6:5 is a powerful description of the sorry pass to which created man has come. So much so, that God decides to Judge men, and execute that Judgement in the Flood.

4. THE GRACE OF GOD

The story of Noah and the Flood is on the one hand the story of God's grace towards man in warning him of the Judgement to come, and in particular of His choice (of grace) of a man and his family, and on the other hand it is of judgement itself. The word 'grace' is used because (a) Man, having fallen, is deserving of no help, and (b) Having become totally corrupt only warrants total Judgement. God's stated intention is, 'I have determined to make an end to all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them: behold, I will destroy them with the earth.' Yet, as we shall see, the Flood itself, whilst vindicating God's righteousness, also leads on to the expression, by God, of universal grace. (For an account and explanation of the Flood see IVF's *New Bible Dictionary*, pp.426-429).

Genesis 6:9 tells us Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, that he walked with God. II Peter 2:5 says he was a preacher of righteousness; Hebrews 11:7 that he was a man of faith. All this in contrast to the depravity about him. Following the Flood, Noah offers a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and God creates the universal covenant of grace, promising not to judge man this way again. Had the covenant not been made, man would have been terrified every time rain commenced to fall. The truth is that man's evil continually needs judgement, but such judgement would constantly impair the creation, and interrupt the rhythm and flow of the seasons. Man does not deserve this covenant, but God is thus revealed as the God of grace.

Noah, himself, having been a righteous man, following the flood is given a mandate which is similar to that of Gen. 1:28ff, although with some differences. Capital punishment is commanded for murder, and man is to have stewardship of the world. Despite his exemplary life, Noah, having grown grapes, becomes drunk. The privacy of his drunken stupor is somehow violated, seemingly by Canaan his grandson, who is cursed. This event leads, us on to 'the families of the earth', which is the central theme of our next study.

5. SALVATION HISTORY

We can see now, that the Noahic grace would be unintelligible, unless we were to understand the corruption of man, and the deserved judgement. The fall of man would be unintelligible without the truth of man's nature in creation, and this in

turn would be unintelligible without understanding the nature of God as Creator, and the truth of creation. Creation, also, is unintelligible without understanding the purpose of God in creating. So we are beginning to understand the salvific thrust of the Scriptures.

.... oo0oo

-- NOTE ON PRE-FLOOD PROPHECY --

When we realise that the writer of Genesis was in possession of material which is not now to hand, then we have to read very carefully, the resources which are ours. The following facts emerge:-

- (i) *Adam and Eve heard the prophecy of God against Satan, in Gen. 3:15. By this they would understand the principles which would henceforward be at work - the conflict between God and Satan, and this with a view to man's redemption.*
- (ii) *Abel was a prophet, and prophesied. Cf. Luke 11:50-51, I John 3: 11f. His prophecy was powerful enough to cause Cain to kill him. It also must have indicated the course of history.*
- (iii) *Enoch was a prophet. Comparing Gen. 5:21-24 and Jude 14-15, we see the prophecy must have related to Christ, and the judgement to come (cf. Dan. 7:10, 13-14).*
- (iv) *Noah also prophesied. Cf. II Peter 2:5, Gen. 6:3.*

From this, we can realise that man has had the truth, through the prophets, *since the world began*. Cf. Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21. From all this, we may deduce two conclusions -

- (i) God had planned all things from before time, (II Tim. 1:9-10, I Cor. 2:6ff, Matt. 25:41, etc.) and had told them by the prophets.
- (ii) Man knew the plan and intention of God but rebelled against it.

Hence we conclude that salvation history is a clear fact of Scripture, and may not be understood apart from the plan and prophecy. In this way, God's righteous wrath is wholly vindicated. #

-- STUDY THREE --

FAMILIES: BABEL AND ABRAHAM

1. INTRODUCTION

We might be excused for thinking that the Hebrews had an inordinate interest in genealogies. They certainly had a deep interest in them. In Gen. 4, the genealogy of Cain is written, up until Lamech, enough to show that this family had developed after the manner of its progenitor, Cain. In Genesis 5, the genealogy of Seth is called 'the generations of Adam', and traces the family through to Noah, Noah being described in very special terms (cf. Gen. 5:28-29). Following the Flood, we have the account of the families of the earth, and their genealogies. The lists should be closely studied. They yield this:-

- (a) The generations of Japheth are mentioned without comment, except that they formed 'the coastlands people'.
- (b) The sons of Ham include Nimrod, who was a mighty hunter and began a kingdom - Babel. Canaan, upon whom the curse of Noah was laden, is the progenitor of those who were to become evil, and fierce opponents of Israel at the time of the Exodus.
- (c) The sons of Shem are simply nominated without reference, except to Peleg, who seems to be named through the Babel incident.

It is when we come to Genesis 11 that we have a significant genealogy, this time particularised so that it leads to Abraham, or, as he was then known, Abram.

The aim of the genealogies is to show the families, and their divisions, and the consequent happenings, with reference to the events of history to come. Genealogies make an interesting study, no less in our own day. This, in particular, relating to the effect which godly progenitors have upon their descendants. However, two main factors emerge, relating to these genealogies - (i) Nimrod and Babel, and (ii) Abraham and the Covenant.

2. NIMROD AND BABEL

Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-11) is described as the first *mighty man*, following the Flood. He was 'a mighty hunter before the Lord'. 'Before the Lord' means that God took special note of him. The name Nimrod, in its verb-form, means 'let us revolt' 'Mighty hunter' could mean a 'tyrant-hunter' ie. 'one who hunts men and puts them to his own use'. The fact of *kingdom-making* and *city-making* seems out of context with God's general mandate to men to spread across the earth Ideally, this latter would be in an equitable use of the land and its resources, however, 'kingdom-building' has begun. Men are being herded into cities. (*Note.* The reading of Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, will amplify this point.)

Nimrod is not seeking to do the will of God, but to rebel against the God-given

order, so that he may establish his own order. We can see then, that whilst any genealogist might tell us many interesting things, this writer is only interested in what serves the purpose of his thesis, which we claim to be, in the ultimate, salvation history.

Babel epitomises man's corporate rebellion against God. It may not be that all men joined together against God, since the descendants of Shem seem to have favourable reference, and Peleg is named after the division of the earth ('Peleg' = 'division'). However, there is generally a wide and concerted rebellion against God. 'Come' is a word of urgency and determination, seeking to gather many to co-operate in rebellion. The desire is -

- a) *To build a city.* This one will not be constructed of clay or mud, nor even of sun-baked mud-bricks, but of tough, lasting materials, designed to keep out an enemy, and so establish the race.
- b) *To build a tower* which will 'reach unto heaven' This is part of the city, and could be the watch-tower, or even a refuge against another flood, or a giddy hope of actually invading God, either symbolically or literally.
- c) *To make a name for themselves.* This 'name' is the accomplishment of greatness. It represents position, authority, power and ability. Men were going to do this out of their own resources - a sort of post-diluvian humanism.

The wrongness lies in that they were told to spread across the face of the earth, and here they explain deliberately, 'Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' God looked at the city, seeing its progress and divining the intents of mankind. It is not for nothing that Babel and Babylon stand throughout Scripture for the Kingdom of Evil, and the city of man, as against the city of God. God says that there is 'nothing that they propose to do which will be impossible for them.' For this reason He confounds them by changing their languages, so that they cannot rightly communicate. Theirs is a dangerous, anti-God, secular unity.

3. ABRAHAM, AND THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH

It has been said that history is divided into two sections (*a*) Pre-Abrahamic, and (*b*) Abrahamic. By this it is meant that all events leading up to God's covenant with Abraham, are virtually described, simply in order to present the context of the covenant of grace. This is not, of course, to major on Abraham, but the grace of God. We are speaking, then, of history from Abraham to the end of time as Abrahamic., in the sense that the covenant of God embraces it all, and in fact that this is the meaning of it all.

Abraham, with his character, actions, and times, requires special treatment. However, we must discuss some of these elements, even if very briefly. Abraham's original name *Abram* means either 'The Father (God) is exalted' or 'He loves the Father'. *Abraham* means 'Father of a Multitude' Abraham's name is very significant, seeing that he lived in Ur in the area of Babylon, where idolatry was rife. We have to see that this kind of evil, not explicitly mentioned before the Flood, was universal. Hence Abram's name was significant. Jer. 50:38 says, 'It is the land of graven images 'and they are mad upon their idols.'

Abraham is the *first of the patriarchs*. God is 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', i.e. 'not of 'Adam or Noah.' In fact, as we shall see, Abraham is the human father-figure of all history. As we have seen, God is interested in families, and this from the beginning of history until its end, and in eternity

(cf. Revelation chs. 21-22). Abraham is not simply a patriarch by the fact that he is the first of the fathers of the covenant, but rather that he has the unusual qualities required for three great peoples of the earth to look back to him as father - the Jews, the Islamic race, and the Christians.

First, he comes out of a situation of idolatry. Secondly, he appears as unique in faith in a world of evil. Thirdly, he is selected to be the covenant-father. Fourthly, he is a prophet (of. Genesis 15:13-16, 20:7). Fifthly, his fatherhood is one which comes very late in life, when he is a mature man, and this fatherhood of Isaac, the covenant-inheritor is severely tried at Mr. Moriah during the sacrifice. Doubtless he understands the Fatherhood of God (after whom he is named), in that the NT tells us he believes Isaac was to come back to him through resurrection (cf. Heb. 11:17-19). The birth of Isaac was also the resurrection principle (cf. Rom. 4:16ff), as also he understood God to be the God of promise. He must have seen the day of Christ (John 8:56) in ways which are incomprehensible to us. Sixthly, he is primarily *the* man of faith in history, and was accordingly justified (cf. Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6-7 and Heb. 11:8f). He, being a prophet and the covenant-father, looked to the day when the city of God would appear.

Now, as to the families of the earth, God had given the promise that in him, and in his seed (Christ, cf. Gal. 3:16ff) would all the nations of the earth be blessed. What we must not miss is the fact that this one man, amongst all contemporary (and future) nations was to be the pivotal one for blessing or cursing (Gen. 12:1ff).

There are many other elements we could consider, but the primary one is that of the true children of Abraham. These are they who are like Abraham, that is, men and women of faith (cf. Matt. 3:7-10, John 8:39f, Gal. 3:6-9, 29). It can be seen that the true children of Abraham are really the children of God. All of this has immense importance since it means that the salvation which God has for His people relates primarily, in history, to the person of Abraham, who, whilst he is no dispenser or effector of faith, is, nevertheless, the father of the faithful.

4. CONCLUSION

If the giving of the covenant is examined, it will be seen that the fact and importance of it comes gradually to Abraham in a life set about with a number of trials. Yet Abraham's importance cannot be seen fully except in Biblical retrospect. When it is said in Hebrews 2:16 that God is not concerned with angels but with the descendants of Abraham, then we realise the great significance of the event of the covenant. This is underlined in Luke 1:70-75, where Zechariah says that the coming of Messiah is the fulfilment of this ancient covenant. Likewise in Galatians 3:13-14, the cleansing from the curse, and the gift of the Spirit are seen to be part of the ministry of the New Covenant, which is really the Abrahamic Covenant come to fulfilment. For in his time, when evil men were set against the God of glory, Abraham is indeed remarkable. This is why he was called 'the friend of God' (Isaiah 41:8) and 'the prince of God' (Genesis 23:6, Heb.)

-- STUDY FOUR --

ISRAEL, EGYPT AND THE EXODUS

1. INTRODUCTION

If we were studying the *history* of Israel as such, then it would seem inconsiderate to try to fit its history from Abraham to Joshua within this one paper. However, it is *salvation history* which we are discussing, and we have the principle of Acts 2:23 in mind, where men do what they will, but God has planned it this way. Man is responsible for *what* he does but God is in control of, and uses what man does, for His own purposes. In regard to the making of the man Jacob, who was later called Israel, we have to look back to Abraham and the covenant. Isaac can be seen, especially at Mt. Moriah, to have been a very fine son, and to have submitted himself, as a young man, to the altar and the knife of his father. This shows (a) His trust in his father, and (b) His trust in his father's trust in God. Isaac was a true son of Abraham, a fitting son of the covenant.

2. JACOB AND ESAU

The lives of these two need to be examined closely. Of Esau, we discover that he was a 'profane person' (cf. Heb. 12:15-17), who sold his birthright for a pot of food, at a time of hunger. The blessing of Isaac was taken by Jacob, whose very name meant 'supplanter'. Yet Jacob coveted the birthright and the blessing. It was told his mother before their birth that he, the second child (of twins) would rule the first. Hence the importance of Malachi 1:2ff - 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.' Jacob was marked out as the third patriarch. As Isaac has the promises of covenant given to him, so also Jacob. (See Genesis 28:11ff.)

Esau had married out of the family, but Jacob was prepared to marry into it, and followed the command of his parents to do so. Thus the stock of Abraham's family is continued. When Jacob marries the daughters of his uncle Laban, this covenant stock produces the family which comes to be known as the children of Israel. Jacob's name is changed to Israel (Prince of God) when he has a special encounter with God. God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, and to Isaac, but Abraham was told it would become the possession of his heirs, only when the iniquity of the Amorites came to ripeness, which would bring judgement. This judgement, of course, would then be righteous, and not premature.

3. THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

The story of this family, as it grows and has interaction between its members, is interesting, but the outstanding one of the family is Joseph, who knows at an early age that he is set for greatness, especially in helping his family. Hated by most of his family because he seems so proud and to be favoured of his father, his brothers plot his death, but after much suffering he becomes - after Pharaoh - the leading ruler in Egypt, and because of him, the family - including

Jacob - is saved in a time of famine. As a result the entire family migrates to Egypt. Joseph can tell his brethren., 'But as for you, you thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good to save much people alive' (Gen. 50:20). He had said, previously (Gen. 45:7), 'God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.' This again is in accordance with Acts 2:23, and the promises of the covenant. That is, God is keeping His covenant people alive. He does not act in this way ,towards other nations. He has a goal in mind.

The blessing which Jacob gives at the end of his life is significant for each son. However, it is the famous messianic prediction in regard to Judah, which is significant for salvation history. Gen. 49:10 says, 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs: *and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*' It signifies one who will be ruler over the nations. It has been variously interpreted by many.

4. ISRAEL IN EGYPT

The death of Jacob, and later that of Joseph, with the fact that the Hebrews were a race of shepherds, made them ultimately to become a slave people within Egypt. One of the remarkable facts is that Israel did not die as a people under those conditions. It is clear (cf. Ezek. 20:1-8) that they gave away to the idolatry of Egypt. Yet they kept their identity, and although they suffered intense hardships, this seemed to increase their hardiness as a race. It is truly a remarkable story which is told of Moses, that he should bring this people out of Egypt, in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties. His incredible adoption by the daughter of Pharaoh, his Egyptian training, his early attempts to help his people, and then his training in the desert, all show the way in which God prepares useful tools for His purposes.

What we have to recognise is the personal intervention by God, all through history, to fulfil His plan and purpose, at each stage. The intervention of the angel at the burning bush in the desert, the provision of Aaron, the process by which Pharaoh's heart is alternatively hardened and softened, until the people of Israel are geared to the task before them, of the Exodus. The miraculous visitations of God upon Egypt appear incredible when Israel is seen by Egypt to be a servant-race. Yet it is to Israel God has given the covenant, and hence this chosen people must succeed. Seen in any other way, the accounts read like fatuous folk-lore, or unlikely happenings. Far from being such, the Exodus is one of the most amazing events of history, yet wholly intelligible only as part of the history of the world's redemption.

5. ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS: THE ACTS OF THE EXODUS

Throughout the OT, little *rationale* of events is given. Rather, God is shown by His *acts*, communicated through His *prophets*, and obeyed in His *commands*. Passages such as I Corinthians 10 and Revelation 12 show that Satan has worked incessantly in history, although he is rarely mentioned in the OT. Egypt comes to symbolise the slavery and bondage of sin and evil. Hence Israel's Exodus through the action of God is most significant for understanding the nature of God. It is the defeat of an hostile enemy who is seeking to thwart the accomplishment of God in His covenant-purpose. Again, we have to understand that all the nations were idolatrous, and the time of the Canaanites, for judgement, was almost ripe. Idolatry is ingrained into Israel also, but God does not abandon His people because of this, and He is about to redeem them, not only from Egypt,-but from the evils into which they have come.

Had they immediately gone to Canaan, they would have become avid idolaters there, of the local deities. However, God planned to reveal Himself in and by His acts, and it is upon these acts that He bases His relationship with Israel, as they with Him. The reading of Psalms (cf. Psalms 105-108) shows how they remember these great events. Also a reading of Exodus to Deuteronomy shows how Israel was shaped into a new destiny.

We can sum up this making of a new nation under the following events:

- (i) The release of Israel from Egypt.
- (ii) The provision of food and drink - rations - for a large body of people.
- (iii) The giving of the Law - which Israel came to see was an event unique in history, for to whom else has been given the Law?
- (iv) The making of the Covenant, and the structure of the sacrificial cultus.

Almost all of these events were what we would call 'supernatural', i.e. God intervened, and confronted His people with new events and understandings. He was God who acted in liberation, law, providence, and His acts were unmistakable.

At the same time, God acts *prophetically*. Moses is described as a great prophet, and the type of the Prophet-to-come. See Deuteronomy 18. The prophecy by Balaam (Numbers 24:17-19) speaks of the 'Star out of Jacob' and 'the Sceptre out of Israel'. Even the events of the wilderness are examples for the future living of God's Covenant people (cf. I Cor. 10). The law, as we later hear, is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. At once it both commands and teaches. At the same time, the sacrifices are not so much law as they are grace, seeing they bring forgiveness as, and when, needed. Finally, Moses in Deuteronomy 18 predicts the rising of the True Prophet, whose words must be obeyed as those of very God Himself. No ordinary prophet could speak thus.

6. ISRAEL IN THE PROMISED LAND: JOSHUA THE LEADER

The brilliant understanding which Moses and Aaron had of God, in contrast to many within Israel, took much to communicate. It needed the cultus of the law, the statutes of commands, the precepts of godly living, the seal of authority and leadership. It needed time. Forty years in the wilderness was all too short. Moses, too, had partly failed. Joshua, a man who shaped himself on Moses, and who had proved to be a warrior of God, became the new leader. Moses and Aaron were no more. Entering the Promised Land (promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so many hundreds of years before) was no small task. It has been called 'the land of fruit and fight.' The Book of Joshua describes the long process by which the various tribes moved into their prescribed inheritance. It also reveals the failure to possess all the land., and the continuing conflict against the Canaanites and their idolatry. Joshua, at the last, confronts them with a choice, primarily, of idolatries - that of Egypt, or that of Canaan. He says he and his family will serve the Lord, and they say they will do similarly, but he does not seem to be confident of this.

The real question on which this section closes is, 'How deeply has the truth of the Covenant-God penetrated? How many are truly children of Abraham?' Unless we remember that all history is part of the on-going plan of God, we will be greatly depressed. Only true understanding of His prevailing authority and sovereignty saves us from despair and cynicism.

.... oo0oo

— *STUDY FIVE* —

ISRAEL: THE JUDGES AND SAMUEL

1. INTRODUCTION: JOSHUA AND THE SETTLEMENT

The book of Joshua forms the first of the 'Books of the Former Prophets'. In other words, the story of the settlement in Canaan is related to prophecy. Reading Deuteronomy, especially chs. 27-31, we see the prophetic thrust of Moses' exhortation. Simply put, his thesis is this:-

'God has chosen you, not because of any intrinsic worth of yourselves, but because you are to be His means of blessing the nations. Hence, you have a great responsibility, namely to obey Him, and to keep His law, and to prove His covenant. If you fail to do this, by forgetting His goodness in releasing you from Egypt, and by thinking you are what you are by your own efforts, then you will surely come to grief. Especially will you come to grief if you forget God, His law, and 'if you turn to idols. God will surely punish you, even to exile. Then you will remember Him in your grief. You will repent, and God will renew you.'

As we have seen, Joshua sought to bring about the destruction of the evil and idolatrous Canaanites, but at heart did not believe this would happen. He had seen so much of the inner addiction to idolatry which Israel had evinced in the wilderness. Nevertheless, he sought to establish the settlement, and himself withdrew from further action (cf. Joshua 23:1ff), and encouraged the people to begin living in the land, and settling permanently.

2. THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

The Book of Judges is also included in the Former Prophets. It opens with Israel still committed and seeking to cleanse Canaan of its idolatrous inhabitants. Judah takes the lead in this venture. However, the inhabitants are not cleansed from the land, a fact which was to bring great distress upon Israel. After Joshua's death there was no leadership and (2:11), 'the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers ... they went after other gods ... '. Chapter two then recounts the principle which operated in the days of the Judges, namely this:

- (i) The people of God came into sorry straits because of their idolatry and rebellion.
- (ii) They then became oppressed by the idolatrous people around about.
- (iii) The Lord raised up a judge (or, judges) and freed them from their bondage.
- (iv) When the judge died, then the people went back to their idolatry, and the cycle repeated itself.

The writer observes that in fact God used the idolatrous nations for 'the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord which He commanded by their father, Moses.' (Cf. Judges 2:21.)

The remainder of the Book of Judges speaks of these men raised up who acted as leaders, as had Moses, and then Joshua. As such they were not kings, but leaders who delivered their people from bondage, and then led them. In most cases we are told that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them. This may seem strange, since for the most part they were warrior-leaders who destroyed the enemy, but the issue was that the name of the Lord was being defamed by the subjection of His people to idolatrous nations, even though they had brought it, for the most part, upon themselves. Chapters 17-21 constitute a horrendous account of how deeply Israel went into sin. Idolatry commences it, and civil war, harlotry, marital desertion, homosexuality, rape, adultery, and finally, mass abduction result. The people which is to be God's chosen tool, and to produce the saving seed for all nations is in an evil and sorry plight. The book closes with these words, 'In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.' This is the principle of anarchy. The writer infers that only a strong king could alter this situation.

3. SAMUEL AND HIS LEADERSHIP

With Samuel, a new era is introduced. Samuel comes at a time of virtual apostasy in Israel. Eli the priest is the only leader, and his priest-sons are debauched. However, it is the significance of Israel in the plan of God which makes her sin so reprehensible. The events which surround the birth and training, as also the call of Samuel, mark him out as unusual in Israel's history. Himself from a Levitical family (cf. I Chron. 6:33ff), the following elements constitute his ministry at this most vital time of Israel's history, and, we might say, God's salvation history:-

- (i) *Samuel was the last and greatest of the judges.* Preceded by judges of lesser stature, Samuel is little less than a king, but greater than any Judge. We know that he went on circuit, judging the needs of the nation. At Mizpah he judged Israel (note the importance and nature of judging - I Sam. 7:6f, 10:17f, ch.12). Samuel's judgeship gave way to Saul's kingship, and this was mediated from God by Samuel. Even so, Samuel still stands as a strong prophetic figure, to his death.
- (ii) *Samuel was the priest of Israel.* I Samuel 9:13 implies that Samuel alone was able to offer sacrifices. He was, from this point of view, the spiritual leader in Israel.
- (iii) *Samuel was a great prophet in Israel, in fact one of the greatest, ever.* In Acts 13:20 it is said that God gave Israel judges until *Samuel the prophet*, meaning by this that the old order was finished. In Acts 3:24, Samuel is described as the first of the prophets. Abel was the first (nominated) prophet, but Samuel commenced a whole prophetic movement. Judges 6:8 and I Samuel 2:27 both speak of prophets, but they were not in this order of prophets. From Samuel to Malachi there is now a succession of prophets, and it is clear why they have to be, and what they have to do. I Sam. 3:1 is very significant. 'The word of the Lord was very rare in those days; there was no frequent vision' (cf. Acts 2:17f). This meant that because of Israel's sorry state, prophecy was very rare. In the days of the Exodus and entering into Canaan, the Lord had been present, symbolised visually by the pillar of cloud and fire. The word of the law had been a great

communication of God. Now there was very little. Samuel's mother, Hannah, certainly prophesied in her famous song, and especially of Messiah-to-come (I Sam. 2:10), yet regular prophecy was virtually absent. According to Exodus 7:1-2 the prophet is the very voice of God.

However, it is *what* Samuel and the succeeding prophets have spoken that is so important. 'And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these (NT) days' (Acts 3:24). In this context I Peter 1:10-11 should be read. I Samuel 19:20 (cf. 10:5) shows that Samuel was over the company (school) of prophets who prophesied, and indeed must have been their founder and teacher. This would be a new order in Israel, but then the times demanded it. It was not that the prophet outmoded the priest, but that God had to exhort these people of the law to abide by the law and to do His will. Yet primarily the prophet communicated the mind and intention of God.

Again, the prophets were concerned with 'things to come', not curiously, nor after the manner of a cult, nor even because of Israel's failure, but because God's plan never intended to maintain Israel as such, nor even the status quo of the Mosaic covenant. Rather was it concerned with the salvation of the world. Hence the great importance of the prophet.

(iv) *Samuel introduced the Monarchical System.* This is a story in itself. Briefly, however, we see the following:-

- (a) Samuel's sons, as Judges, were no better than the sons of Eli (I Sam. 8:1f).
- (b) The system of judges had to pass away (cf. Judges 21:25) and a king had to rule.
- (c) Samuel was led to anoint Saul, who at first accomplished a remarkably good work.
- (d) Samuel was later led to anoint David, whose line was to be perpetual and from whom Messiah was to come - 'Great David's greater Son.'

Samuel, then, was an effective agent in the plan of God, ie. the history of redemption.

-- STUDY SIX --

ISRAEL AND THE MONARCHY

1. INTRODUCTION

The two books of Samuel, and the four books of the Kings and Chronicles are all part of the books of the Former Prophets. They constitute prophecy. By this we mean that they interpret the events of history, in the light of the purposes of God, and are intended to teach, in the prophetic manner. The history of Israel is the history of the kings from the time of Samuel, until the Exile, when, in fact, the monarchy ended.

2. THE MONARCHY COMMENCES

Samuel disliked the thought of a king. Israel had operated through prophets (Deut. 18:15), priests (Deut. 33:8-11) and judges (Judges 3:9), and Samuel, as we have seen, embodied these three, and had given spiritual direction to Israel, raising it up into a nation. Nevertheless, in Deuteronomy 17:14ff permission is given to Israel to have a king, but it is God, and not the people, who will choose him. In fact, God is King over all the earth, and especially over Israel, and so the kingdom is a theocracy, with the king a sort of vice-regent for God. Warnings are given about the way a king shall reign, and what he should and should not do. Sadly enough, in seeking their first king, Israel had rejected not Samuel, but God as their true King (I Sam. 8:7-9).

As we have seen, cities can be very bad things, and this may apply also to kings. Yet there is the City of God, and there is God, the King of His eternal Kingdom. So a king may be good. Certainly, in the history of Israel, great responsibility is put upon him. He has authority greater than that of priest and prophet, when it comes to the affairs of the nation. For this reason, in Deuteronomy 17 the king is told to know and reverence the words of the law, and also to obey them, so that he may not become proud, but reign long as a godly king.

The story of Saul is that of a man who, though a man of great stature, is humble enough at the beginning, but who becomes 'lifted above his brethren' as Deuteronomy warns should not be the case. It is true that Saul ascends to authority and acceptance by his victory over the enemy, the Ammonites. Behind him, always, is Samuel, as God also is behind Samuel. Keeping in mind the responsibility of the nation to be in accordance with Exodus 19:5-6, it is clear that Saul soon chooses to reign as he wills, and the trouble commences at this point. Israel rarely rises to the level of true witness to its covenant God.

3. DAVID AND THE MONARCHY

Saul was the greatest in height of all Israel, and David was not, and so, unlikely to attain, by nature, to greatness. David, like many another in the redemptive line, was the youngest brother of a family. God truly chose and

anointed him, in accordance with the Deuteronomic claim that He Himself would choose the king. Saved from a bear, a lion, the Philistines, Saul, and even his own son (Absalom), David was truly there by the hand of God. Joshua is a type of Jesus, both by name, and by having led his people into that promised land, yet Jesus has David as his full type, for David completed the work left unfulfilled by Joshua. He subdued all Israel's enemies, and reached out even beyond the borders of promised Israel, and subdued other nations.

David conquered Jerusalem, and made it Zion (Psalm 2:6-7), the city of God. He brought prosperity and peace, and proved to be truly kingly. Saul scarcely had the stature of a king, but David typifies all true kingship, especially in regard to redemption's plan. David wishes to build the house of God, but God promises David that He will build his house (II Sam. 7:11). When it comes to Messianic expectations, Psalms such as 2 and 72 (with others) pass beyond the merely human, and we are in some realm of Messiah, of which David is the dynamic type. The following OT Scriptures should be studied in respect to whom David was, and to whom Messiah will be:- Isa. 11:1-9, 9:7, Psalm 72, Psalm 110, Zech. 3:8-10, 6:12-13, cf. Psalm 45, where the Davidic Messiah can be called 'God', yet is anointed by God.

The NT of course abounds in Davidic Messianic terms and addresses. These are too numerous to be listed. Jesus is descended from David and fulfils all that it was said David would be and do. Without going into these details, and remembering that he was often addressed as 'Thou Son of David,' the parallel passages of Matthew 22:31-45, Mark 12:35-37, and Luke 20:41-44 pose the question, 'How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet."' Jesus is saying that David utters this, prophetically, of Messiah, whom he (David) acknowledges to be greater than he, although he descends from David. In this powerful way Jesus shows at once the greatness of David, as also 'Great David's greater Son.' Whilst that is powerful enough, what helps us is that we can work back from Messiah to David, and see that (a) He was an excellent king, (b) He possessed in measure the elements which were to constitute the Messiah to come, and (c) David himself, being in the line of God's history of redemption, was a type of the Messiah who would bring that redemption.

4. POST-DAVIDIC MONARCHY

Let us remind ourselves that the accounts of the monarchy constitute the prophetic teaching, warning, and exhortation of the OT writers. As we said before, they have a thesis. It is this which springs from the warnings given by God, through Moses, to His people, concerning obedience and blessing, disobedience and cursing. Solomon, for all his wisdom, and his brilliance as a monarch, brought in the seeds of Israel's apostasy in new types of worship which followed his many brides of other nations. Solomon flourished beyond the Deuteronomic injunctions, and became a taskmaster, thus giving grounds to Jeroboam, who split the nation into two. Henceforth there were two nations, the ten tribes in the north, and Judah and Benjamin in the south. The worship of the north was virtually idolatrous. The reading of the Books of Kings and Chronicles is the account of 'good kings' and 'bad kings'. It is obvious that from a secular point of view, these kings were often better in some ways than they are described. However, they are Judged in Scripture from the point of view of whether or not they worshipped God, kept His law, and lived in accordance with the Covenant. This constituted their true worth.

We must remember also that the prophets of God were present and busy through these times, and that God continually communicated His mind and will, as well as warned His people. This we will view, more particularly in our next study.

What we have to see here is that the demand of Exodus 19:5-6 (cf. Deut. 7:6) is rarely, if ever, fulfilled by Israel. In the southern kingdom the family of David reigns, as God had promised. In the northern kingdom, one dynasty is succeeded by another, and the horror of idolatry is seen in its resulting degradation, bloodshed, nepotism, intrigue, and countless insurrections. The Books of the Kings and Chronicles should be read very carefully. With them the prophets who prophesied in their reigns should be read in their correct context. Gradually the picture will emerge, of the conflict of those years. Looked at from a secular point of view, it was simply that other nations rose as Israel descended, so that finally she was destroyed as a nation in Palestine. Seen from God's point of view, she was His elect people, greatly blessed, and equipped with the moral law, the promises, the sonship, the glory, the worship, and the covenants, (Romans 9:4-5), yet she betrayed these. The men who led her should have been great in the power of their God, but they were more often evil, idolatrous, greedy and apostate. They were virtual hindrances to the plan of God.

As yet the True King had to arise. This would be Messiah. He would usher in God's redemption.

5. CONCLUSION ON THE MONARCHY

At this point we can come to no definitive conclusion on the monarchy, since we need to see the work and ministry of the prophets, and their interpretation of the historical events in the light of Exodus 19:5-6 and equivalent Scriptures. Whilst we can conclude the manner in which each king was, singly, good or bad, we must think of it all in the wider purposes of God. For this reason we have appended a short note on Israel and the purposes of God.

-- NOTE: ISRAEL AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD --

We are about half-way through the studies on salvation history. If we are not careful we will view history as the *story of man*, and his doings, and will interpret events in the light of man. Instead, history is the *story of the actions of God*, and (thus) how God reveals Himself. To view Israel's history as God's history would be most depressing. It is only when we see that God has taken the man Abraham, and from his stock set out to shape up a nation for His purposes, that we realise the dimensions of the task. Jacob, a 'supplanter', is to sire a nation which is to be the priest-nation to the world. In this nation we find the weakness and sinfulness of man, an inherent idolatry, an innate rebellion, and a self-concern which is the despair of those who would idealise this people. God does not work by numbers, and indeed Gideon's reduction of his men to three hundred, is a parable of what God is about with Israel. (So says Jonathan Edwards.) We will see, in the prophets, the 'doctrine of the remnant' God takes Israel through many vicissitudes, shaping the nation, or rather, the remnant, for the purposes initially declared in Genesis 3:15 (later in Gen. 12:1ff and kindred passages), and ultimately brings forth the Saving Seed in Christ.

If we lose sight of this principle, we will fall into two (unbiblical) errors - (i) That God has failed, generally speaking: Israel is a loss. (ii) God tries time after time, and failing, devises expedients to meet these recurring

contingencies. Against this we need the teaching of Scripture, much of which does not appear explicitly in its early pages:- Isaiah 14:24, 'The Lord of hosts has sworn., "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand"'. Isaiah 14:26-27, 'This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts-has purposed and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out., and who will turn it back?' Isaiah 46:9-11, 'I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it.' Isaiah 48:3, 6-7, 'The former things I declared. of old, they went forth from my mouth and I made then known.: then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass ... From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things which you have not known. They are created now, not long ago: before today you have never heard of them'.

Add to these Scriptures many we have quoted above from both OT and NT, concerning God's purposiveness, and it is evident that nothing will divert God from fulfilling His own intentions. (Cf. I Cor. 2:6f, Ephes. 1:12f, Ephes. 3:11.) The history of Israel, then, is what God is about in fulfilling His own purposes, however much, at times, history appears to be to the contrary. This key to the Scriptures enables us to ask less questions, and to see more answers!

-- STUDY SEVEN -

ISRAEL: THE PROPHETS AND THE EXILE

1. INTRODUCTION

In our first study we suggested that the best way to understand salvation history is simply to read the Bible, thoughtfully, from cover to cover, and to read it in this way many times. Even so, a chronology of the OT is necessary to refer to, in order not to be swamped by the amount of material, and to see how, and at what times, the mind of God was revealed through the prophets, as well as through the events. An excellent chronology of the OT and the NT can be found in the *IVF New Bible Dictionary*, on pages 212 to 228. In addition, see the article on 'Israel' pp.578-588. The chronology which we will undertake (below) will be very sketchy because prophets and kings overlapped each other in their times, and often no prophet is explicitly mentioned within certain reigns of the kings.

2. THE IMPORTANCE AND WORK OF THE PROPHETS

We saw from Exodus 7:1-2 that the prophet is the mouth of God. Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that in 'many and varied ways God *spoke of old* to our fathers by the prophets'. This means that God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and later to the fathers within Israel. The prophets, then, are very important. We have already concluded that the prophets have been telling the plan of God, in history, since Abel. This means that the prophets would be always aligning God's people (among many other things) with His plan.

Moses has been called 'the normative prophet'. When we realise that through Moses God said to Israel, 'I will take you for My people, and I will be your God' (Exodus 6:7), then the ministry of the prophet will always be in this connection. To Israel God had given what Paul calls 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises ...' (Rom. 9:4) so that prophecy in Israel has to do with the outworking of these things. We have observed that if Israel had kept 'covenant-level' with God then prophecy would be confined to predictive elements. However, exhortation, rebuke, etc. had also to be part of prophecy. Indeed it was in the light of Israel's being God's people that the prophets have to 'forth-tell' as well as 'fore-tell', and the fore-tell-ing has almost always to do with exhortation, rebuke, and judgement.

It is also important to understand that the prophet fulfilled the need of the people to see that God was currently acting, about to act, and what He would do. Without this, life is nothing, is purposeless and mediocre. The secular counterpart was divination, clairvoyance, and the like, which were forbidden in Israel (Deut. 18:9f). These elements were connected with idolatry. This proves - to faith - that prophecy is dynamic. Isaiah 45:20-22 is an important passage dealing with such matters. Israel really has no essential being apart from fulfilling the will of God, in obedience. Hence, being such a rebellious people, the prophets within her had a tempestuous course, and were for the most part maligned and killed.

It is also helpful to note from the outset, that the prophets were responsible for committing much of the text of the OT to writing. It is possible that Samuel wrote the book of Joshua, and probable that he wrote Judges and Ruth, and even part of I Samuel. It is suggested that Nathan may have written part of the two books of Samuel, and a reading of II Chronicles 12:15 suggests that both the prophets Shemaiah and Iddo wrote books. II Chronicles 20:34 (cf. I Kings 16:1-7 speak of a writing prophet Jehu, and II Chronicles 26:22 tells us that Isaiah was a chronicling prophet.

Be these things as they may, the prophets were very important. They were to communicate the word of the Lord to their generation, and generally this meant delivering it firstly, to the king. A prophet such as Nathan lived with the king, and his words were accepted, but other prophets were less accepted. Deuteronomy 13 and 18 gives a test of true prophecy and prophets, namely that what they say comes to pass. False prophecy, by nature of the case, would have a very powerful (adverse) effect.

The kings, then, ought to have listened to the prophets, but more often than not, they did not heed them. In some cases, the prophets were able to advise in a way which saved God's people at the time of danger. On other occasions, the prophets (eg. Jeremiah) had to prophesy doom to the nation, and surrender to the enemy. Good kings listened to the prophets. Evil kings rejected them. However, that did not mean the prophet was a failure, for it was part of his ministry to pronounce judgement. It was failure to listen to the prophet (i.e. to God) that brought Judgement on the king or nation.

In II Chronicles 20 we read that Israel was under pressure by Ammon and Moab, and that Jahaziel prophesied against the enemy, and for Israel. The king (Jehoshaphat) said to his people, 'Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; *believe His prophets, and you will succeed.*' Judah was saved. I Kings 16 speaks of the prophet Jehu prophesying against the king, and evil then coming upon the royal household.

Allied with this matter of the prophets, is what we may call 'the prophetic thrust'. By this we mean that often God spoke to His people, and in particular the kings, but it is not always recorded that it was through a prophet, although it may well have been that. For example, in I Kings 11:13, Solomon is told that God will Judge Israel. However, He promises that Judah will be saved, and this is found to be so in II Kings 17:18. Judah is continually preserved, as we have seen in II Chronicles 20. In II Chronicles 12:2-12, Judah is preserved against Shishak of Egypt, and the prophet Shemaiah foretells that deliverance. Again in II Chronicles, Abijah the king takes up a prophetic stance against the northern kingdom, prophesying its defeat on the basis of Judah's acceptance with God, and the northern kingdom is defeated. In II Chronicles, Azariah prophesies to Asa, calling upon the king to return to covenant godliness and to destroy idolatry, which Asa does. In Hezekiah's time (II Kings 19), the land is saved from the enemy when the king, humbled, comes before the Lord. The prophet Isaiah prophesies that Sennacherib will not triumph, and Judah, again, is saved.

On the other hand, the prophecies of men like Amos and Jeremiah, speak doom to the nation. Both Elijah and Elisha were rejected by the ruling monarchs. Other kings employed false prophets to counter the true. And so we could go on, but this fact is very clear, that the Former Prophets declare the counsel of God, and His judgement upon those who do not keep the Mosaic Covenant, and in particular the Deuteronomic promises and warnings. Hence Israel is ripe for Judgement. It is due to go into Exile, and so it does, but in this order - firstly the northern kingdom in BC 722, and then Judah, in stages, from 605 (Battle of Carchemish) to 587 when Jerusalem finally fell. (Cf. Daniel 9:3-19 - 'Mini-Salvation History'.)

3. THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

Speaking generally, we can say the message of the prophet fitted his time. From Abel to Noah was one period, and from Abraham to Moses another. Moses to the Judges to Samuel was a further period, whilst Samuel to Malachi constitutes the final course of the OT prophets. Here again, in this latter course, there were great differences. Samuel inaugurated that course, as also the monarchy. Following the division of the Kingdom, the idolatry of the northern kingdom and its impending doom evoked one kind of prophecy, whilst Judah, with the promise of a long dynasty made to David and Solomon evoked another. The state of Judah gradually drew from the prophets not only the story or prediction of Judah's fate, but what we might call a 'prophetic rationale' of God's intentions, judgements, and future action. After all, they were God's people, called by His name. They had been given a function to perform, and this they had failed. What would God now do? Was His Judgement for ever? What too, of the Messianic promises?

We have to conclude that prophecy is a vast subject, and refuses to be encapsulated within a few basic principles. We will seek, nevertheless, to condense its dimensions into some basic principles. This paper will not allow us to document the causes and proofs of these:-

- (i) Israel, called of God to be His tool, has been called electively and not because of its merit.
- (ii) Mere possession of the Covenant does not make the people of God and exempt them from Judgement.
- (iii) What God has said He will do, both in grace and Judgement, He will do; nothing will change that. 'God is not man that He should lie, or a son of man that he should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfil it?' (Numb. 23:19). Hence, the word of the prophet is *the very word of God* (cf. Amos 3:8, Isa. 55:10ff, etc.).
- (iv) Israel (i.e. Judah) is of all nations most reprehensible because of the kindness. God has shown, and the covenant He has made. (cf. Exodus 19:5-6). 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities (Amos 3:2).'
- (v) Within Israel, the evil of idolatry, social evils, and injustice must be castigated, and the people judged. Not so does the priest nation live! Also its foolish dependence upon the temple, and the sacrifices, God will judge as hypocrisy.
- (vi) This being said - and done! - God's covenant love will never fail. Having sent them into Exile, and having punished and purified them, He will return them to their land, a chastened and worshipping people, purged of idolatry.

Behind all of these events, and leading up from them, are God's Messianic purposes. A King will reign in righteousness. A ruler will conquer the kingdoms of this world. The Kingdom will be everlasting, ruled by Messiah, and given to the saints of the Most High. He who comes will be both Suffering Servant and Triumphant Conqueror. All the world will flow towards Zion.

4. CONCLUSION: THE EXILE

In our following study we will briefly examine the Exile. We can understand

why those who were of Israel found the judgements of God difficult to comprehend. Had they listened as a nation to the prophets, they would have repented, lived at true covenant-level, and succeeded as a nation. However, this was not so; they did not listen. Behind their idolatry and rebellion, God had His purpose, and it was one of 'amazing grace'.

The exilic and post-exilic prophecies are indeed very exciting. They promise so much, that the mere success of Israel as a nation would seem mediocre beside it. The mystery of suffering will probably never be fully explicated, but to quote Paul (in this case for Israel as a people - albeit rebellious):-

'This slight momentary affliction is (was) preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.'

II Corinthians 4:17

.... oo0oo

-- STUDY EIGHT --

ISRAEL, THE RETURN, THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

1. INTRODUCTION

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the return of Israel to her land. The prophetic Books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah give some hints as to the condition of the captives during the exile, as also some of the intentions of God for His people. The Inter-Testamental period (between the OT and the NT) is covered by books of history, especially some of the books of the Apocrypha. From them we glean the historical materials. In fact, we have a wealth of material on the events between Malachi and Matthew, and can understand the contemporary thinking of Jesus' day.

2. THE ACTS AND FACTS OF THE EXILE

(i) The Fall of Samaria - the Northern Kingdom

In II Kings 17 we read the account of Samaria's fall. Brought under subjection to Assyria, Israel had to pay tribute. However, Hoshea, the king of the northern kingdom, tried to effect an alliance with Egypt, and when this was discovered, the King of Assyria made a siege of the city of Samaria. The city resisted for three years (725-722 BC) and then fell. Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, died during the time of the siege and Sargon II, his successor, completed the siege. He then deported 27,290 of the elite of the northern kingdom, and resettled the region with ethnic groups from Cuthan and Sippar in Babylonia, and from Hamath in Syria. These became what were known as Samaritans, having adopted the worship of the Israelites, although this was in a form unacceptable to the later Jews. II Kings 17:7-18 gives the rationale for Samaria's defeat - failure to obey the covenant, which included the practice of idolatry. Virtually speaking, the deportees were lost for ever as an ethnic group.

(ii) The Fall of Judah - the Southern Kingdom

Following Samaria's fall, Judah's kingdom endured for almost 150 years. After the fall of Samaria, Assyria grew even more in power. Then it began to decline. Babylon began to grow in power, and Egypt, in order to destroy this power, set out to defeat Babylon, only to be met by Josiah of Judah, who was defeated and killed (see II Kings 23:29f), so that Judah was now under Egypt. Neco of Egypt sought to defeat the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, but himself was defeated. In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar sent a large army against Jerusalem and besieged it. He took 10,000 of the elite and artisans, transporting them to Babylonia. A son of Josiah, Zedekiah, was placed upon the throne, and should have remained faithful to his Babylonian agreement, but he played the political game his father had played, and shifted his allegiance to Egypt. The result was that in 587 BC the siege of Jerusalem began, and although there was a brief respite when Hophra of

Egypt marched into Palestine, yet Hophra was defeated, and a year later the city surrendered, had its wall broken down, its temple destroyed. Zedekiah the king was taken to Babylonia, along with a large body of captives. A small government was set up under Gedaliah, who himself was shortly assassinated. So the kingdom of Judah had fallen.

(iii) The Babylonian Exile

In exile, the captives gradually formed their identity as 'the Jews'. The prophecies of the pre-exilic prophets, plus the ministry of the exilic prophecies, helped them to form this identity. In accordance with Jeremiah 29, they soon developed economic security and social stability, even though in a foreign environment. Ezekiel lived amongst these exiles, and the promises of the body of the prophets now had deep significance and meaning for the exiles. Not all would wish to return to Palestine, because they learned to adopt the new culture. Isaianic prophecies, with their promise of Messiah, of the Suffering Servant, of the new Kingdom, and of the time of harmony which was to come, fed the minds and spirits of the more thoughtful ones. In this exile, Israel was refined and cleaned from her idolatry, as her people could think over the dreadful outcome of that practice. The Law, too, took on new significance. In many ways a new people, a holy remnant, was being shaped - the material which would be useful for the fulfilling of God's plan. The old arrogance had been eliminated, which looked upon the nation as God's favourite people, rather than God's elect people. Judah was ready for the task God had for her.

3. THE RETURN OF THE EXILES (BC 538-433)

Isaiah had prophesied that God would raise up the Persian Cyrus, to be a saviour to Israel, and this is what happened. Babylon weakened as an empire, whilst the Persian empire grew in strength. Defeating Babylon, Cyrus pursued a policy of benevolence towards some of the conquered peoples. A number of Jews returned to Jerusalem under Sheshbazzar, a member of the (former) Davidic royal family. The Jews, with local Jews who had remained, set up the altar and the foundation of the temple. For certain reasons they did not proceed with the rebuilding of the Second Temple. That this temple was very significant was outlined by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. God said that its building would be 'not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit'. Protests went to Darius, the new king, but it was proved that this was in order.

Ezra, the scribe, later travelled from Babylon to Jerusalem, under the king's edict, to stimulate the worship at the temple, to teach the law of God, and to assist in enforcing the law of the king. It is impossible to estimate the significance of this ministry which Ezra exercised. It certainly helped to build the people up, as people of the law. The coming of Nehemiah was also part of the plan of God to establish His people in their new-found humility. Nehemiah organised the rebuilding of the walls. Some sort of wall, or part of the original walls had been constructed, even as early as the sanctifying of the altar, but now the work of making Jerusalem a city again was undertaken, and completed against great odds. The teaching of Ezra in Ezra chs. 9-10, and the reading of the law in Nehemiah, as also the making of the covenant with God in Nehemiah, chs. 8-10, contributed largely to the new pattern of life, and the understanding of God.

4. THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

The actual history of the years which followed Malachi to Matthew, is an involved one. Power passed from the hands of the Persians to Alexander of

Macedonia, and so the control of the empire became Hellenistic. Judea submitted eventually to Alexander. Then commenced the domination of Hellenico-Egyptian Ptolemies, giving away to the Seleucids, of the Syrian-Greek order. This continued until BC 168, when down to BC 135 there was the Maccabean Revolt under which Judea gained some independence, and although this was tenuous, it provided some relief from outside domination. From 135-63 BC, the Hasmonaean Dynasty reigned, that is an internal domination, with an uneasy alliance with outward powers, until, commencing in BC 63, Judea, upper Galilee and Transjordan (which had all been Judaized) began to come under the domination of Rome.

The history, as indeed in the whole of the Inter-Testamental period, becomes extremely complicated. All we can say is that the processes took place which bring Galilee, Samaria, Idumea and Judea to the place where we find them, as, opening the pages of the New Testament, we assist our understanding by studying its contemporary situation. What we do know of this period was its anticipation of a Messiah, its rejection of the over-lordship of Rome, whilst it also had a fear of false Messianic claims and other political pretensions.

5. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND HISTORY: NOTES ON THE PURPOSES OF GOD

It can be seen that very quickly, *in seeking to study the history of Israel, we may easily and soon miss the history of God.* In our interest in what happened to Israel - she being God's special tool - we get led off into the path of historical details and incidents. One clue is provided for us, namely that Scripture does not deal with the inter-testamental period. It is not a deliberate and live issue. The last book - Malachi - was written some four hundred or more years before the events of Jesus' birth. In some ways those inter-testamental years are not of great significance.

This leads us back to the fact that we are not studying the details of history, as such, but the history of salvation, which certainly involves these details, but is greater than them. Hence, we need to re-state certain principles. They are these:-

- (i) God's true history (which is identical with salvation history) commences with creation. The doctrine of creation tells us what God is about, aided, of course, by the later interpretive truth of Scripture.
- (ii) The fall of man is most significant, for we deduce he perished as a man. Yet God announces at that time that the serpent will be defeated through humanity.
- (iii) Man's fall leads to evil which is judged by the Flood, yet this is followed by a universal covenant of grace in regard to creation, providence, and judgement.
- (iv) The scene is set by man's attempt to be independent of God
- (v) (Babel), so that God chooses Abraham, and makes a covenant with him which is universal in its application. Carefully the seed of Abraham is selected (elected) until it flowers out in Israel. The history of Israel can then be traced in detail, yet it is only really significant where it relates to, and is part of the great Abrahamic Covenant. Everything relates ultimately, not to Israel, but to the grace of God.

We need to examine this point very clearly, for we have given a large portion of study to Israel. Is it, in fact, worth such study? Should we not have proceeded to the NT, where we really see salvation history working out? This is what drives us to re-examine what we have seen in Israel. What we have

seen is this:- Israel, chosen by God to be His special people, and to be His servant, and to witness to Him, has in fact rarely accomplished this calling. Idolatry has been a continual plague in Israel, apart from some rare times of revival. Hence Israel has undergone domination by her neighbours, recovering only in the kingdoms of David and Solomon. She has been split into two, and although having times of partial freedom from domination, has eventually been defeated, firstly the northern kingdom, and later the southern. Whilst the Jews have a return under Cyrus, and later under Darius, yet Israel remains a small state under the vassalage of greater nations. Even when she achieves some kind of home-rule, she is nevertheless far from being 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. How then, can we really call her history, salvation history? There is a very clear answer to this question.

The answer lies in prophecy. Not simply prophecy which begins with Samuel, or even Moses, but that prophecy which begins with Abel, through Enoch, Noah and Abraham, as well as the later prophets, Moses, Samuel and his succession. This clue is given by Jesus, who later said, 'O, foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' He then showed himself to his disciples 'in all the Scriptures'. Israel rarely, if ever, listened to her prophets. They seemed so far away from the current events and patterns of their days - in the sight of the congregation. They were constantly saying things which were unacceptable. Prophecy is confrontation of people by the very voice of God. Hence, Israel was God's instrument, albeit often unwilling, rebellious and inept. In her history the message of God came through by His prophets. After Malachi, God had nothing more to say. The *corpus* of the prophetic truth was filled up. All God had wanted to say was said. To Israel in general, it was irrelevant. In this Israel had made a mistake, that is to say, Israel which was not the holy remnant. Only the remnant understood.

It has been said, 'The Old (Testament) is in the New (Testament) revealed. The New is in the Old concealed.' This is true. Israel did not remember that God had spoken to Abraham *concerning the whole world*. Israel had thought herself to be the *favourite*, if not the only, people of God. However, God's punishments were on Israel because she did not fulfil His will. 'You only have I known of all the nations of the earth'. Israel thought more of her place in Canaan, than of the purpose of God. She thought more of the Law than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who makes universal Covenant.

It needed the prophets, not only to remind them, but to teach them of the great things which God was (is) about. Prophecy, because it is immediate confrontation, is uncomfortable, and even enraging. Hence Jesus said, 'It is not possible that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem.' 'You have slain the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah.' The prophets continually reminded Israel that the law and the sacrifices were privileges given to Israel, not a cult to be followed. They spoke of the greater issues. These were:-

- (i) The Kingdom - later to be seen as the Kingdom of God, not just of Israel.
- (ii) The Covenant, Abrahamic, and so 'New'.
- (iii) Messiah, his coming and victory. This Messiah was also the Suffering Servant who would 'bear the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors.' Hence universal forgiveness was also prophesied.
- (iv) The Day of the Lord, the consummation of all things, the defeat and punishment of evil, and the ushering in of the final and eternal harmony of all things - the new heavens and the new earth.

It must be seen that the generality of Israel would be strangers to all this. They ought not to have been. The following NT Scriptures should be studied to see that what the prophets said, really mattered. (Luke 24:25-27, 44, Acts 1:3, 13:27, 32, 26:22, 27.) It is clear that the great deposit of the prophets, was what God was doing in and through Israel. In the context of her idolatry, rebellion, and failure, the great themes we have mentioned began to etch themselves clearly. Where better a Covenant of Grace, but where the Covenant of Law had not produced results? Where better the Kingdom of God, than where the kingdom of Israel had declined, and was abortive? Where better the promise of universal forgiveness, the universal outpouring of the Spirit, than where Israel had groaned under her sin, and been dry, through lack of the Spirit? And so on. Israel's defeat, loss, deficiencies, all highlight the grace of God. The prophets would have no place, no reason, no rationale but for the congregation of Israel. In Israel's provincialism, they display the universality of God, and His grace. This foil to the greatness of God was the glory of Israel, in the ultimate, albeit she herself did not see or understand it this way.

If we find Israel a small nation, with only the godly within her truly understanding the greatness proclaimed by the prophets, yet she was there, Israel, partly in the vast dispersion of her people amongst the nations, and partly in the provincial fellowship of her people in Palestine. Linguistically, culturally, theologically, she was set to be the people to whom, and through whom, the great prophetic truths were about to be fulfilled. To say it simply: 'The law came by Moses, but grace and truth, by Jesus Christ.'

-- STUDY NINE --

GOSPEL HISTORY I - JESUS AND THE MINISTRY

1. INTRODUCTION: THE FULNESS OF TIME

Galatians 4:4 speaks of Jesus coming 'in the fulness of time'. In fact everything God does is in 'the fulness of time'. It is possible for us to see this, as we read the Scriptures. Hence Luke 24:26-27 shows that men ought to believe 'all that the prophets have spoken', for it is in accordance with this that God acts. Apologists have shown that in regard to the one-ness of the world under Rome, the universality of the Greek language, the excellence of communications, especially with Roman roads, and the cultural openness of the age, that this was a time appropriate for Jesus to come. Doubtless God had arranged these things to happen, but they are not primary, although helpful. What is primary is that whilst Israel's significance diminished, if anything, in the political and geographical dimensions of the time, its prophetic climax had come. Israel was the cradle of the Seed which was to redeem Israel, and be a 'light to lighten the Gentiles'. Opening the first pages of the Gospels shows us that. Yet only the prophetic mind can see it, truly, as the 'fulness of time'.

Without doubt, the people of Israel, particularly the faithful remnant, had come to sense and anticipate the following:-

- (i) *The Kingdom of God.* They expected it to come. They were in anticipation of it.
- (ii) *The remission of sins.* This had been spoken, also, by the prophets, but it was to be a remission which would transcend that of the sacrifices, as such.
- (iii) *The universal outpouring of the Spirit.* This would be in contradistinction to God's giving the Spirit 'by measure' as He had done in OT times.
- (iv) *The coming of Messiah.* Messiah would be the prince, anointed of God, who would deliver Israel, and set up his universal Kingdom.
- (v) *The New Covenant.* It is clear from Luke 1:68ff that the Abrahamic Covenant was prominent in the thinking of the true remnant of Israel. Both Zechariah and Simeon thought in wider terms than Israel, whilst Zechariah, and Mary, thought in terms of the Abrahamic Covenant. We can trace the high level of expectancy of these things in the contemporary history. John the Baptist came preaching these things. They were not new and novel to his listeners.

2. JESUS THE SON-MESSIAH

The birth narratives describe a believing remnant, as also the events which make Jesus' birth out of the ordinary, although not fanciful. His awareness of

God as Father as early as his visit to the Temple at the age of twelve, is indicative of his relationship with God. Because no man taught until the age of thirty, he was baptised by John at that time. John himself spoke of his own ministry as tapering off, whilst that of Jesus was to enlarge. Jesus' commentary on John was that he was the greatest born of woman, a prophet, yet more than a prophet, since John had not only completed the course of the prophets commencing with Samuel, but had witnessed the coming of the things they (and he) had prophesied, namely the Kingdom coming, Messiah appearing, and the coming of universal forgiveness and the outpouring of the Spirit. Hence Jesus said that the prophets were 'until now', but the Kingdom itself had come, and men were pressing into it.

Israel should have been alerted by the pronouncement of God, at the baptism of Jesus, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' This statement is a conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. This is important since Psalm 2:7 speaks of the Messiah-King-Son, whilst Isaiah 42:1 speaks of the Servant. Both are to minister to and win the nations of the world. An examination of Matthew 16:16 and 26:63 virtually makes 'Son of God' and 'Messiah' as synonymous terms. We have some difficulty in comprehending the term 'Son of God' since, in Christian history, we have come to understand it, to a great degree, through the lens of the Christological controversies of the first few centuries (AD), when it was spelt out in the Greek language and metaphysical terms. In the Gospels, it primarily refers to the One who is the anointed of God to fulfil His plan. A close study of Psalm two, and the allied references in the NT, shows a most interesting view of Jesus as Messiah-Son.

At this point, then, the *incarnation* needs to be noted and understood. As Matthew 1:21-23 indicates, his birth is in fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14. The message to Mary by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-35) shows further that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies, especially as they relate to the house of David. The birth will be virginal. The joy of the angels at his birth, and their song, is evidence that this one is the 'Christ the Lord'. Hence the pronouncement at his *baptism* that he is the Son, is in line with Gabriel's statement, 'therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.' One of the most pertinent comments on the baptism is by Peter in Acts 10:38, 'Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with power and the Holy Spirit, who went about doing all manner of good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil'.

3. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS: THE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Having been anointed, Jesus is Messiah, that is the King, in conformity with Psalm 2:6-7. He is at the same time the Son. As Son he was to do the will of his Father, God. This is what it is all about. The first event of that ministry was to test his consciousness of Sonship, and his obedience to the Father, God.

(i) The Temptation

The point of the temptation is 'If thou be the Son of God'. If he is he will do only God's will, obey only God's Word. This he does. He refuses the principles by which Satan works, and takes the way of God, which is, of course, the way of the Cross. As Adam was tested as to his loyalty to God, so the Second Adam is tested and does not fail.. He shows he will, as man, fulfil the will of God. His course, then, is set. In him God is 'well-pleased'.

(ii) The Ministry

As we have seen, Acts 10:38 is an excellent summary of that ministry.

In practice we know that he taught concerning the Kingdom of God, he did miracles, healed people, and proclaimed the Gospel. He taught concerning the will of God, and his own death on the Cross. What he did he did only in conformity with the Scriptures, with what was written of him. It was 'that the Scriptures might be fulfilled', and that 'as it was written'. He was fulfilling the pre-prepared, and pre-announced plan. The actual ministry was announced by himself, at Nazareth, in the following terms, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' All of this ministry was that of the Messiah.

John the Baptist, having proclaimed Messiah, was at one point in doubt, for (see Luke 7:16) he had heard 'A great prophet has arisen amongst us!' and for John this was not enough. Deuteronomy 18 shows that the great prophet will be of the stature of Messiah (cf. Acts 3:22f), but John wanted 'more than more than a prophet', since Jesus had said he, John, was 'more than a prophet'. Jesus then sent to him a message concerning himself, quoting a conflation of Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6 and 61:1, all of which would indicate that he was Messiah. A number of elements have to be seen, regarding the ministry:-

(a) **The Kingdom of God.**

Jesus taught much concerning this, especially to his disciples. For this Kingdom they had followed him, and he pronounced that healings and exorcisms were the Kingdom of God coming, in action. Cf. Matthew 12:28, Luke 10:1-11, 9:1-6. To teach meant the Kingdom was near. To heal meant its action was felt. To exorcise was the Kingdom of God against that of Satan (Luke 11:17-23). Nevertheless the Kingdom did not come in the sense that it was set up in Palestine, or was universal in the world. Perhaps the disciples despaired of it, and that is why Jesus said, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom' (Luke 12:32, cf. 22:28f).

(b) **The Holy Spirit.**

John had taught concerning the outpouring of the Spirit which was to be universal, and to link it with the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus rarely taught concerning the Spirit, and never to the larger public. He claimed to minister by this Spirit, and encouraged the disciples to ask for the Spirit (Luke 11:13, cf. Matt. 12:28).

(c) **The Forgiveness of Sins.**

Jesus taught this theme, pronounced by John the Baptist, who said it was contingent upon (i) The action of repentance, and (ii) The coming of the Kingdom. Jesus led persons to forgiveness, and taught that one should forgive another continually, and seek the forgiveness of God and others where necessary. However, in his ministry there was nothing concerning forgiveness as John had led them to expect.

(d) **The New Covenant.**

Some OT Scriptures link covenant and Kingdom teaching together. Jesus never actually mentioned the New Covenant, but sometimes referred to the covenant with Abraham, but rather to show the Jews that they were not, many of them, true sons of Abraham, genuine 'sons of the kingdom' Apart from that, this great theme of the prophets seemed to remain unspoken.

(e) **The Cross.**

The teaching concerning the Cross was virtually limited to the close group of disciples and followers. At the same time, Jesus indicated to those who would follow him - they thinking him to be triumphant Prince-Messiah - that there was a cross at the end of the road, and with it ignominy and shame. However, it is his statements such as in Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33 - 3 in one Gospel - that stress the importance of this. Such had been envisaged by none who are contemporary with him. The teaching of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah was not seen as relating to Messiah.

(f) **Miracles, Healings, Etc.**

As we have seen, these were the outward and dynamic expression and operation of the Kingdom. Jesus never taught in the merely academic conceptual fashion. Truth was experiential rather than merely noetic. It was operative, rather than propositional, although propositions can certainly be derived from his teaching and action. John's Gospel calls the miracles by the term 'sign', meaning these signs conducted the understanding person to the reality of the Kingdom. Hence Nicodemus saw the signs, primarily as miracles, and was convinced Jesus was from God. Jesus said new birth was essential in order to see the Kingdom. Nicodemus had not read the signs.

(g) **Israel and the Gentiles.**

We have seen that the prophets - in their understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant, understood that God's action and grace would ultimately embrace the whole human scene. Jesus was careful to go 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:6, 15:24). The Samaritans were preached to, but the Gentiles, virtually not at all, although Jesus said the faith of the (Gentile) centurion was greater than he had seen in Israel. He demanded faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman in a manner he did not require of Israelites. At the same time, he was as insistent as John the Baptist that blood descent from Abraham did not make a child of Abraham. On one occasion he said that the 'sons of the Kingdom' (by natural birth) would be cast out, and that the Gentiles would take their place - a shocking thought to Israelites. Also he talked of the vineyard (God's Kingdom) being let to others (the Gentiles) rather than the Jews who killed the prophets, slew the Son, and paid no return to the King. In this way Jesus, whilst ministering solely to Israel - in accordance with the prophets - indicates the universal nature of his ministry. We shall see, later, that his final commands and teaching to his disciples, makes the fruit of his ministry to be universally related, and fully in accordance with the prophetic teaching of Israel.

4. JESUS IN PALESTINE

The chronology of the events of Jesus' ministry properly belongs to the historic and geographic background of the NT (See IVF *New Bible Dictionary*, pp. 223-225.) Born in Bethelhem, and having been taken to Egypt, he grew up in the village of Nazareth. The prophecy of Hosea 11:1 - 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son', is applied in Matthew 2:14f, to Jesus. His ministry covered only a period of a few years, three at the very most. In that time, he worked in Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and part of Perea. A map with his journeys will make clear where he went, and at what times. However, salvation history, as we have seen, does not enlarge merely with the passage of much time, nor minimise with its decrease. Those few years were the most consequential of all, for history, especially salvation history. Yet, as we have observed, they would have no valid context, no authentic operation, without the years leading up to, and on from, the Covenant of God with Abraham.

-- STUDY TEN --

GOSPEL HISTORY II - JESUS AND THE END EVENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: PREDICTION OF THE EVENTS

In Acts 2:22-23, we have a fine statement of the principle of God's planned salvation - 'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know - this Jesus, *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up '. (i) God plans according to His will. (ii) Man acts according to his own will, but this is what God uses to fulfil His plan. Hence, when the prophet predicts, he knows *that* those events must happen, not only because it is inevitable they will, but even more so *that* such events are indispensable to the fulfilment of God's plan.

2. THE END EVENTS: JESUS FULFILS THE PROPHECIES

If we understand that Jesus' ministry was always moving towards its predetermined climax, then we will not look at it as a ministry which was unfortunately shortened and concluded by a mix-up, in understanding and opposition, at the end of the three years. It continued no longer than God had planned it. In Mark 8: 31, 9:31, 10:33 Jesus makes predictions of the Cross, and *the ought of its indispensability*. We can, then, trace the patterns of the end events. They are, roughly, as follows:-

(i) The Transfiguration

Its significance can be summed up in the following words: 'He was transfigured that he might be disfigured, that we who are disfigured might become transfigured.' That is, the transfiguration was with a view to the Cross. Moses and Elijah, representing both law and prophets, speak with him concerning his *exodus* which he is to *accomplish* at Jerusalem. The original event of the Exodus of Israel prefigures the *true Exodus* when Messiah - the new Moses - leads his people out of bondage into freedom. The voice of the Father repeats the Messianic-Sonship affirmation of the Baptism (Anointing), 'This is my Son, my Chosen One', and adds the 'hear him' which refers to Deuteronomy 18:15ff, and so makes him 'that Prophet' who has to be obeyed. Yet in all, the transfiguration is with a view to his death. The prediction of the Cross which follows (cf. Luke 9: 43-45) is feared by the disciples. In fact they have not *heard*. Shortly after this, he 'set his face towards Jerusalem', for it was the time for him 'to be received up' (Luke 9:51).

(ii) Entrance into Jerusalem

In Matthew 21:6ff, the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem describes the

people saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.' In Luke 13: 31-35, Jesus, who has his face set towards Jerusalem, says, 'I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for *it is not possible that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.*' He is welcomed by the common people as 'The Son of David', i.e. Messiah, for they say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!' He is called 'King of Israel!', and Zechariah 9:9 is ascribed to him, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt.' This messianic entrance, which was not accepted by the ruling hierarchy of the Temple, was confirmed by Jesus, who asserted his messianic authority in driving the money-changers and traffickers in the sacrificial animals from the court of the Temple.

(iii) Final Discourse

These discourses must be very significant, for they were Jesus' final, definitive, and explanatory teaching. In them Jesus exposes the falsity, error, and hypocrisy of his opponents (Matt. 23:1-39, Luke 20:45-47). (*Note*:-; From the commencement of his ministry, there are two elements which gradually polarise - those who accept and understand him, and those who do not. In John 15:18ff, Jesus explains this. We must not be deceived into thinking that this was by accident. It simply crystallised the innate opposition or acceptance which existed.)

This preaching acted as a catalyst to both acceptance and rejection by his hearers. In Luke 21 and Matt. 24-25, Jesus predicts what will happen to Jerusalem, and warns its inhabitants, much as had Jeremiah, of the destruction of the city. He also predicted the ultimate events when he would return, at the end of the age, with his angels, to show his power and victory over evil, and to bring in the fulness of the Kingdom of, God. The very last discourse was only to his disciples, in the upper room where he held the Last Supper.

In this discourse, he gathered together all the elements which had been in his ministry, as predicted by John - the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, the universal outpouring of the Spirit. He also spoke of the New Covenant. In the discourses in John, chs. 14-16, he speaks of (a) His Father, (b) The Holy Spirit, (c) Himself. He also speaks of what will happen when the Spirit comes. In the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, he gives some reason for the Cross - 'My blood shed for the remission of sins'. In this way he rounds off the action and teaching of his ministry. His followers, at least, should be prepared for the Cross. In fact, they are not.

(IV) GETHSEMANE

This event has been variously interpreted. It has been seen as Christ's sudden revulsion at the Cross, in the beginning of sorrows. It has also been seen as Christ actually dying in the Garden (cf. Matt. 26:38), and his pleading to live in order to go to the Cross, being bewildered as he was by this unforeseen experience of death pressing upon him. Hebrews 5:7 seems to confirm this, for in the accounts an angel comes, ministers, and strengthens him (against death?). Whatever the explanation, he was prepared to do the Father's will, and so proved obedient to death (Phil. 2:8, cf. Heb. 2:9-10).

(V) THE JUDGEMENT, AND THE CROSS

The judgement of Jesus has been shown to be invalid according to the principles of Jewish judgement. However, he was judged by the Sanhedrin (Jewish Parliament), and taken to the Romans for sentence and death. The Governor,

Pilate, does not find any valid charge, but finally agrees to have him crucified. The events of the judgement, Cross, and burial take up a large portion of the Gospel accounts. As the Acts and the Epistles show, this event of the Cross was powerfully significant. The seven utterances of Jesus, whilst on the Cross, can be shown, each one, to be significant. The women, alone, are faithful to Jesus, as the disciples flee and hide themselves.

(VI) THE RESURRECTION

The Gospel accounts, whilst not easy to reconcile, make it clear that Jesus rose, in his own body, from the grave, and that the event had a powerful effect in Jerusalem. Jesus appeared to the women, and to the disciples, explaining the following:-

- (a) The events of the Cross and Resurrection, and his impending entrance into glory, were in accordance with the prophets (eg. Luke 24:25-27, 44ff).
- (b) He was about to ascend to the Father, but was sending them with the Gospel, into the world, to make disciples of the nations.
- (c) He was nevertheless with them, in all they were doing.

They would soon be baptised with the Holy Spirit and witness to him.

3. CONCLUSION

We see, again, that events which seem to be devoid of power and magnificence are the events which are truly the power of God, especially in regard to the salvation history which God is outworking. To the disciples and others, the events of the Judgement, death and burial of our Lord., were not only bewildering. They were Just not understandable, because they did not fit with their image of greatness, nor the prophecies of Messiah which they knew. The Resurrection, of course, changed this, but then they did not easily believe it had happened. As we will see, it was the *explanation* by Christ of his Cross and death which revealed to them the fact that the OT had prophesied these events, as part of God's great plan, and that they pertained to Messiah.. Hence, when we reflect, we are struck by the remarkable fact that very little in God's salvation history seems great and imposing by outward standards. It is 'the foolishness of God' and 'the weakness of God' by which we are confronted. This is, in fact His salvation history.

-- STUDY ELEVEN --

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EARLY CHURCH - PENTECOST: JEWS, SAMARITANS AND GENTILES

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme in the Scriptures - 'the people of God' - now begins to emerge. In Genesis 49:10, Jacob's prophecy concerning Messiah is that 'unto him shall be the gathering (or, the obedience) of the peoples.' The Abrahamic Covenant promised that in the seed of Abraham all the nations would know blessing. Whilst Israel was of that covenant, it could not, alone, embrace it. We have seen that in the teaching of Jesus there was a widening of this understanding, and that in fact the holy remnant within Israel was always in anticipation of the universal fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham (cf. Psalm 22:22, Hebrews 2:12, Psalm 22:27-28).

2. THE TEACHING, BY JESUS, OF HIS DISCIPLES

In John chs. 14-16 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would be their new teacher. Also he would lead them into all the truth. Again, he would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had previously told them. Following his resurrection, Jesus teaches the disciples. This is seen in Luke 24:25-27, 32, 44f, but it is in Acts 1:3 that we see his subject was the *Kingdom of God*. He spoke of that over forty days, at the times when he appeared to them. We can conclude that much of the Scripture of the OT quoted in the NT would be that which Jesus opened to them. It would form, the basis for their discussion with Jews, their proclamation of the Gospel, and their *apologia* (cf. Psa, 2, !110, poss. Psa. 16).

In *Acts 1:2-8* we see the following significant facts:-

- (a) Jesus was concerned that they should understand the Kingdom.
- (b) He promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- (c) They linked these two events together (as indeed they are always linked in the OT No OT prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is ever apart from God's promise to restore the Kingdom to Israel^{*}).

^{*} They were Israel viewed itself as a kingdom, as God's Kingdom, and thought of its ultimate being as the Kingdom of God, its Messiah reigning over all men. The disciples had difficulty (it seems) in thinking of the Kingdom of God in other terms than of it being restored to Israel. That is, the renewal of Israel's kingdom would actually equal the Kingdom of God. It was this idea which Jesus had to change in their thinking.

correct in doing so, but they did not seem to see the wider connotation of the Kingdom. (Isaiah 32:12ff, 35:1ff, 44:1-5, Ezek. 36:24f, Ezek. 37:1ff, Joel 2:21f, cf. Isaiah 59:20-21, cf. John 7:37-39, cf. Isaiah 58:11, Isaiah 61:1),

- (d) Jesus told them the 'times and seasons' were under the Father's authority, and must remain there. However,
- (e) They would receive power when the Spirit was poured upon them, so that -
- (f) They would bear witness to Messiah, not only in Jerusalem and Judea (i.e. to the Jewish people), but in Samaria (the hybrid-Jew-Gentile people) and 'to the uttermost part' (cf. Psalm 2:6-8), i.e. the Gentiles. This widest concept of the Kingdom constitutes the flowering out of provincial Judaism into the fulness of the Abrahamic Covenant. At the same time, it provides the key both to the *format* and the *substance* of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

3. PENTECOST: ITS HAPPENING AND MEANING

What the prophets promised would happen, and what John the Baptist stated to be imminent - the outpouring of the Spirit - took place on the day of the Jewish Festival of Pentecost - the fifty days following the Passover, and the time of the offering of the first-fruits. The 120 who were closest to Jesus waited for *the promise of the Father* (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4, cf. John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7f). In the chs. 14-16 of John's Gospel, Jesus had said he (the Spirit) would *lead into all the truth*. This is what happened. Filled with the Spirit they were filled with the truth. They understood 'all things', and were impelled to tell these things.

What was so amazing was their sudden grasp of the prophetic writings, or, as we may say, 'the prophetic deposit'. This body of truth which had always been present, was now alive to them and intelligible. Doubtless much of what Jesus had said in his ministry and his post-resurrection appearances, now came to be understood and highly significant. This can be seen by referring to Acts 2:16f, 29-31, 3:21ff, 4:25ff, 7:42f, 48f-, 52f, 8:28ff, 10:43, 13:20ff, 27-33, 40f, 15: 15f, cf. 17:11 and 19:8; 24:14-15, 26:6, 22-23, 27, 28:23. Often, whilst the prophets are not mentioned, the substance of what they have said is taught.

The recognition of the crucified Jesus as being risen, and being Lord and Messiah (cf. Acts 2:36, 10:36, cf. 3:19, 4:12, etc. = apostolic teaching), brought a new people into existence. Whether called 'the true Israel' or 'the people of God', or 'the church' does not matter. A new thing commenced on that day, and 3,120 were now a witnessing body to Messiah. They held a complete body of teaching, 'the apostles' doctrine', and a new way of life - 'teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers'. Their life-style was that of a love fellowship which was to proclaim Christ under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Whilst Pentecost was the beginning of the 'last days' (2:17ff), it was in fact to open the Gospel, or the Abrahamic Covenant, or the Kingdom, to three areas of people - the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles. (i) In one sense we may call Pentecost the opening to the Jews, (ii) The events of Acts 8:1-17 the 'Pentecost' of the Samaritans, and (iii) Acts 10:34-48 the 'Pentecost' of the Gentiles, although of course the latter two were inherent in Pentecost itself. The Book of the Acts is really the story of :- 'Jerusalem and all Judea: Samaria: the uttermost part/s'.

4. THE EVENTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The Book of the Acts, from chapters 1-10, shows the rise of the church at Jerusalem, and its mode of living. The church still worshipped within the precincts of the Temple, and did not seek to divide from its life and worship. However, the teaching it gave brought it into conflict with orthodox Judaism, and the apostles were warned not to preach, under pain of judgement. Their evident power, and their miraculous abilities, made them feared and hated. Their numbers grew rapidly. However, it was the undeniable resurrection of Jesus which confronted the Jews, and enabled the church to preach repentance and faith.

Nevertheless the church seemed to co-exist with current Judaism, until the advent of Stephen's preaching. Himself a man filled with the Spirit, he brought fierce opposition by his debating (Acts 6:9ff), and his death caused a wave of persecution against the church, and many members fled from Jerusalem, into parts of Asia and Europe. A church was formed at Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:19f), which was composed of both Jews and Gentiles - a unique phenomenon for that time, for although Peter had preached to Gentiles (Acts 10), and probably a Gentile congregation grew from that event, yet the mixture of Jew and Gentile at Antioch was a new thing.

Much of the Book of Acts is really given over to the discovery, by the Jews, that Gentiles were equally accepted into the new people of God. Indeed one cannot escape the feeling that this is almost the primary reason for the writing of the book. It reveals the slowness in comprehending the full truth of Acts 1:8, but also the ultimate understanding of it, and the nature of both the church and the Kingdom, and so, of course, the Gospel.

5. CONCLUSION

Our conclusion is that the salvation which God had been shaping up over the millenniums of history was now complete, apparent, and proclaimed. This is no light thought. What the prophets had desired to see, and what angels had longed to look into, had happened, in the events of the advent of Messiah, and the triumph of his death, resurrection, and Lordship. The *experience* of this salvation, and the *proclamation* of it by believers, represented a new phenomenon in man's history. The new and unique faith had come upon the earth, and was being proclaimed with great power. The 'last days' had begun with witness of a new kind.

-- STUDY TWELVE --**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EARLY CHURCH - II
PAUL AND THE NEW CHURCHES****1. INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

In Christian teaching, Christ is designated as Head of his church, but the Holy Spirit is the 'other Comforter', the Teacher and Guide. He empowers the church (by communicating the truth), and he, in practice, directs its actions. Just as 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10), so the Spirit is the one who spells out the testimony of Jesus, and in this the church is involved (Acts 1:8). It is he who empowers at Pentecost and convicts the hearers and causes the church to spring into being. It is not difficult to trace the actions of the Spirit in the apostles, in Philip and Stephen, and in the beginnings of the church at Antioch. All events spring from him. He is anxious to have Christ proclaimed, the Kingdom proclaimed, and salvation to become the possession and experience of God's elect people.

2. PAUL AND THE NEW CHURCHES

It is the Holy Spirit who anoints Paul at the time of his conversion to Christ, and who uses him, as a chosen vessel in the purposes of God. Paul is a most significant person in Christian history, as we shall see. We shall study him at close view.

(i) The Story of Saul of Tarsus

There is a great deal of material about Paul. We gather that he was from Tarsus and so a free-born Roman citizen, in addition to being a Jew who could trace his descent from Benjamin. He trained in Jerusalem at the feet of the famed and devout Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He hated the Christians and certainly knew what they preached, having imprisoned them for these things. Armed with a warrant to arrest and persecute Christians, he was on his way to Damascus when he had an encounter with Jesus, who appeared to him. The appearance could not be said to be subjective, since others saw light and heard a voice. He alone, heard Christ speak actual words, and following this encounter, was found to be blind. Led into Damascus, he spent three days in blindness and contemplation, and was visited by a Christian, Ananias, who laid hands on him. Paul was baptised, filled with the Spirit, and began to preach the Gospel, immediately there, at Damascus. Faced with imminent death he escaped, and returned to Jerusalem, where he was received with suspicion, and then acceptance in the churches of Judea. He returned to his native Tarsus, only to be recalled by the generous-hearted Barnabas, who called him to minister at the now established church of Antioch, with its mixture of Jewish and Gentile converts. From Antioch he had three journeys out into Asia Minor and Europe, and on returning from the third, was caught in a riot started by his Jewish opponents. Imprisoned in Jerusalem, and then taken to Caesarea to escape assassins, he finally appealed to be judged by Caesar at Rome, and was

taken there. So far as we can trace, he spent two years under house arrest, and then two years free of it, finally to be Judged and executed. The Book of Acts does not describe all his action, for a section of one of his letters indicates *an area* of experience which must have taken place without being described, namely II Corinthians 11:24-27.

(ii) Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

Peter was clearly anxious to evangelise his Jewish people. Philip had to be led to Samaria before Peter arrived. Acts 10 tells us of the difficulty of getting Peter to the Gentiles. Paul, however, was commissioned for this ministry at the very moment he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 22:21, 26:17-20). When Barnabas called him to minister in the church at Antioch, Paul was certainly couched by that event in Gentile Christianity. The church itself received a directive from the Holy Spirit to separate and send out Paul and Barnabas on this ministry. Acts chs. 13, 14, 16-20 tell of these Journeys, and their effects.

The impact of Paul and his team, upon the Gentile communities, was very powerful. First in Asia Minor, and then in Europe, churches sprang up. At most centres where he preached there were Jews, often with a synagogue or prayer group, and to these he would go, seeing it is natural to proclaim the fulfilment of Israel's covenant-history, and the substance of the prophets. Acts 13 is an excellent example of acceptance by some Jews, and rejection by the many. The Gentiles warmed to the Gospel, and so churches with Jews and Gentiles were formed. Much can be gathered from both Epistles and Acts as to the nature, substance and result of his preaching. Churches once formed were regulated with elders, and taught both faith and practice.

(iii) Paul Fights for the Gentile Churches

Much of Paul's ministry was occupied with extending his Gospel to the Gentiles, and then defending the churches which sprang into being. A comparison of Acts ch. 15 and Galatians ch. 2 will show that the Jerusalem Jews did not take kindly to the Gentiles being included in the Covenant promises. This discloses a deficiency in their understanding of God's salvific purposes, and the nature of the prophetic deposit. Also they were very culturally Jewish in their Christian faith. However, it is the Gospel which I preached amongst the Gentiles' which so gripped Paul. He had seen the universal implications of Christ and the Cross, and that the Gospel was no Gospel if it were not for all men who would repent and believe. Hence both in Jerusalem and in his writings, he defends the true nature of the Gospel, and this he does in the most brilliant manner. There is scarcely anything written in man's history which is as brilliant as Romans, or as powerful as Galatians, or as lofty as Ephesians.

Ultimately Paul's capture by the Jews, and his ultimate imprisonment and death, were in the cause of the Gospel which was 'to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile.'

(iv) The Message of Paul

Whilst we reserve a more particular treatment of the doctrine of Paul for our next study, yet Paul himself, in the 20th chapter of Acts, gives a summary of what he taught (vs.20-32), and when Acts 26:18-20 is added, then the picture is complete. Briefly, it is:-

- a) The Gospel is repentance to God and faith in Christ.
- b) It is the 'gospel of the grace of God'.
- c) It is the proclamation of the Kingdom.
- d) It is forgiveness of sins and justification (cf. Acts 13:38).

The epistles, of course, enlarge greatly on this. Primary in them is the Lordship of Christ, the primacy of the Cross, and the power of the Resurrection.

3. CONCLUSION

The place of Paul in salvation history, as we shall see further, is greatly significant. He was the person, beyond all, who shaped up the nature of the Gospel in order to make it intelligible in the light of the Jewish faith, and universal need. He spent himself in an uncompromising dedication, and so gripped was he that he did not count his life as anything. Not for one moment would he give away to the enemies of the Gospel, and he was jealous for its purity and truth inside the church, where others did not always understand it. His greatness remains.

-- *STUDY THIRTEEN* --

THE CHURCH, THE EPISTLES AND THE PLAN OF GOD

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CHURCH IN ACTION

It would be impossible to understand the nature and significance of the church from the Epistles, alone. The Book of Acts shows us the church in action. In fact, this was what it mostly was - action. Acts 2:42ff shows the nature of the church at its inception, with its four primary elements of the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. We see it pro-, claiming the Gospel, admitting those who repented, believed, and were baptised. We see it under a system of leaders - elders - and we see it as a community which cared for its own, in its arrangements for the widows and the poor. Hence when we read the sermons given by those who proclaimed, we can understand the Gospel and its nature. We can also see the impact of the Word and the Spirit upon the hearers, but this was never out of the context of the church itself, the living, witnessing body to the Messiah of the prophets. Then again, when we read the Epistles and their substance, we gather much material which was not made explicit in the Acts. Hence we need to read both, each in the light of the other Epistles and Acts.

2. THE EPISTLES: THEIR NATURE AND CONTENT

The Epistles, generally speaking, were written by apostles. In any case, their content is apostolic. Apostleship was the gift given to crystallise the nature of the Gospel and to proclaim it. The Gospel is the good news of God and His Kingdom. It is, in another way of speaking, the coming together of the events and predictions of the OT in the light of the advent of Messiah, and the events of Messiah interpreted in the light of the OT. Hence in the Epistles we find this apostolic content already formulated fully. In fact it is assumed that the readers already know it, for no epistle is, as such, evangelistic. The proclamation (Gk. *Kerugma*) found in the Acts speaks of the prophets' predictions, the life and ministry of Christ. In conformity with these, attested by God in the acts, teaching and miracles of Christ. The Cross is also of the prophets, and so valid. The Resurrection attests to Christ's Sonship, and now salvation is proclaimed under his Lordship. Men must repent and believe, receiving forgiveness, being Justified by faith (Acts 13:38f).

In the Epistles a whole rationale of the *kerugma* is worked out. The Cross is explained, particularly in the Roman and Galatian Epistles, as the deliberate plan of God (cf. Acts 2:23), and it is shown how man is saved by this Cross or Gospel. The results of that salvation are shown in the nature and life of the church, of which the believer becomes a member. Hence some writers have included the whole matter under (a) Proclamation, (b) Fellowship, (c) Teaching, (d) Ministry or Service. Certainly the Epistles are occupied with these themes.

The Epistles are concerned with refuting false teaching, and stating afresh that which is true. They are also combating problems which arise in the various

churches from time to time. The Gentiles who lived in an immoral society have to learn to discern that which is moral and godly over and against what they have previously known. Relationships within the church are most vital, for the very nature of the church (see below) is that of the Body of Christ, being members one of another.

The Epistles, then, are concerned with the content of faith, and the practice of the new life, i.e. in obedience and love. This leads us on directly to the nature of the church, and helps us to understand the teaching and corrective elements of the epistles, as well as the exhortations and encouragements that they give.

3. THE CHURCH: ITS NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The word 'church' is not found (in the Greek) in the early chapters of Acts. It is first found in Acts 5:11. Even then, believers are 'added to the Lord' (5:14, cf. 2:47) rather than to the church. It appears that the emphasis is rather upon the people of God than an ecclesiastical entity. However, these are the church of God, and, as we have seen, they are mainly concerned to proclaim Christ, the Kingdom, the good news, and to have care and concern for their own, whilst praying to and worshipping the Lord.

They are also equipped with power, which often includes the ability to exorcise evil spirits, heal the sick, raise the dead, and do miracles of various ". kinds. In this way, their Gospel proclamation is effective. In the history of salvation, they are the proclaimers of what God has done, in Jesus Christ, to redeem men. Hence they not only proclaim by their words, but by their very being, as the church, and the people of God, the effective nature of the Gospel and its innate truth.

The church comes under a number of forms or figures. They are:-

- (a) **The Body of Christ.** This means that Christ is working in and through his people to effect his plan. It also refers to the intimate relationship which each member has with the Head, and then the other members of the body (Rom. 12: 4f). This is described tellingly in the 12th and 14th chapters of I Corinthians, and in Romans 12.
- (b) **The Bride** This depicts the intimate union that Christ has with the church. It is seen in Ephesians 5, where true marriage is that of Christ and his church - a theme developed in the Book of the Revelation. Acts 20:28 also depicts this beautiful love. However, a wife is there, in the Biblical principle, to share with her husband in the outworking of the vocation God has given them.
- (c) **The Temple.** In fact the word is really *shrine* or *holy place*, meaning the sanctuary (Ephes. 2:21f, I Peter 2:4ff). This temple is being built by living stones and is the dwelling place of God, a picture often given of Israel (eg. Ezekiel 37:27-28), and set forth plainly in Revelation 21:1-5. It means 'the people amongst whom God dwells'.

The internal life of the church, therefore, is very significant. Its external proclamation of the Gospel depends upon its inner nature. Having Christ as Head, and the Holy Spirit as its Guide, Teacher, and the One who empowers (Gal. 5:16-22, Acts 1:8, I Cor. 2:1-5, I Thess. 1:5, etc.), it is the means by which Christ works out his purposes. Hence the internal life of fellowship, purity, inter-relationships, love and service, are all very significant. As expected, we find a strong emphasis upon these elements in the Epistles.

4. THE PLAN OF GOD

The prophets are concerned with the Covenant, the Kingdom of God, the work of Messiah, the Day of the Lord, by which God will have subdued the nations, and have effected His salvific purposes. They are therefore interested in the Day of the Lord. The Epistles certainly see that God has planned all things from before creation. They see salvation as the eternal purpose of God. Also they recognise God's intended defeat of evil, as also in the fact that that defeat was effected, virtually, in the Cross (Heb. 2:14-15, Col. 2:14-15). However, it is the plan of God which is explicit in an Epistle such as Ephesians, whilst expectation of that given end is implicit in most (cf. Rom. 8). Of course, the Revelation gives much of the outworking of this plan, all of which is the completing of the plan of redemption.

In Ephesians, Paul makes the following thesis:- In Chapter 1 he claims (i) that God planned that His people should ultimately be pure and holy before Him, (ii) being sons who have been forgiven by the Cross, and who will be (iii) to the praise of His grace, (iv) and His glory. In fact they will be His sons, His family.

His plan is for the fulness of time, when He will unify all things. Chapter 2 shows that unification of the Gentiles and Israel is effected by the Cross, through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Chapter 3 claims that what God created for, He has fulfilled in Christ, and that angelic powers watch His action, that is the actions of the Church, in order to read His plans. The Epistle to the Romans also speaks of the plan, but rather in terms of God's righteousness. Amongst sinners He works Justifying righteousness, and in doing this He has His ultimate in mind. That is, He has cut off Israel for a time, but ultimately Israel too will be saved, and the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles will be 'life from the dead'. The theme often emphasised in Romans is *the obedience of faith of the nations*. See Romans 1:5, 15:18. In Romans 16:25-26 Paul describes how this obedience of the peoples is 'according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.' This is a very powerful statement, summing up the purpose of God.

Other elements may be observed., namely that in the ultimate, God will be shown as the God of glory, the Redeemer God, the God of grace. He will also be shown to be the Father - by the presence of His family, for He is 'the Father of glory'. All glory will then glorify Him, as He is revealed in His true and wonderful nature. This, amongst other things, is the substance Of the Epistles.

5. CONCLUSION

We now see that the plan of God is not something which has developed by some evolutionary process, or advance in man's thinking and understanding. It is simply the practical unfolding of what God has ever intended. More and more we see the deep significance of the things of creation, the fall, the flood, man's sin and God's Judgement, the Abrahamic Covenant, the working out of it in the events of Israel, and then, through Israel's history and the ministry of the .i prophets, the cradle in which the Seed was born, and effected his redeeming ministry. We can see why the church must be, and what it is called to be and to do. The ultimate end, when all things will be unified (Ephes. 1:9-11), reconciled (Col. 1:20), filled (Ephes. 4:10), and harmonised (Col. 3:14), will, of course, be when all authorities and powers have been subdued to Christ (Phil. 2:9-11, I Cor. 15: 24-28, cf. Heb. 1:3, 10:12-13), and God receives the Kingdom, and is 'all in all'. At that time His redeemed will be, each one of them, and every one of them, in the likeness of His Son. This will be the sealing up, and the sum of all salvation history.

—STUDY FOURTEEN—

THE THINGS OF THE REVELATION: HISTORY OUTWORKING

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

The Book of the Revelation has its own, and unusual introduction. It says, 'Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein: for the time is near.' Also it ends on this note:- 'I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city, which are described in this book.' It is clear, then, that this book is unique. It is prophecy *par excellence*, and must be understood as to what it is about. It can be seen that salvation history cannot be seen in its completeness without this book. It is indispensable to knowing it in fulness.

2. THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

These are very simply told. The book opens with John, exiled to the Island of Patmos for the Word of God, being given a vision of the glorified Lord. The Lord writes seven letters to the churches named, all of whom were situated in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. These letters, whilst personally to the church, have deep significance for the churches in all ages. Then John sees an open door in heaven, and is bidden to enter and to see 'what must take place after this'. He is given visions of God, and of the Lamb, and of the heavenly inhabitants. What is primary is that a scroll with seven seals which is to be the action of God in the history of man, can be opened only by Christ, the Lamb-as-it-had-been-slain. That is, the crucified Lord is Lord of all history. When he opens the seals, each has a vision which is recorded, and this leads on to seven trumpets, and again a vision is shown after the sounding of each trumpet. There is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, as also between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Following this, John sees remarkable events in heaven. Chapter 12 recounts the story of the woman and the child, the dragon (or, Satan) opposing both, and then coming into conflict with angels in heaven, and the saints on earth. Then further evil powers come into conflict with God, and with the Lamb and his followers. Following this, seven plagues are described, as seven angels, each in order, pour out a plague upon the earth. More judgements are enacted against the scarlet woman and Babylon, victory is achieved finally, over all evil powers, and then universal judgement is pronounced. In the last chapters, a millennium reign is described, the new heavens and the new earth appear, and the life and inhabitants of these described. So the Book concludes.

3. THE MEANING OF THE CONTENTS

The Book of the Revelation has always been difficult to interpret. This is mainly because it is looked upon by some as a 'code book'. That is, that it

describes history under a code. If the code could be cracked, then we would understand its events. One of the problems is that the language used is very pictorial, and generally symbolical of great principles of action, rather than describing literal events. (They are, of course, events - and so, actual.)

Often much of history is telescoped. This can be seen, for example in ch. 12, where the prophecy goes back beyond the incarnation of Christ and stretches towards the end-time. Also it has to be remembered that the book is prophecy, and much of prophecy cannot be understood *in its details* until these predicted events actually happen. Yet again, the book was written, not only for later ages, but for the saints who lived at the time of its writing. Generally speaking, they needed assurance that the bizarre events, and the dreadful persecutions of their time *were all part of the pattern of God's history*, and not unfortunate happenings in which evil had the uppermost hand. In fact, as we shall see, the Book really tells us of the sovereign power of God, and of His righteous Judgements, assuring us that the outcome will be as He wills. In this is incorporated the fact that He is righteous, that 'his judgements are true and righteous altogether.'

Naturally the *format* of the book must relate to its meaning. The appearance of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven plagues has led some to reject the idea that the book is in linear chronological order of sequence and events. Some see it as three concentric circles of sevens, seal, trumpet and plague being related. It is difficult to say. Once we drop the code-finding endeavour, and let the book speak as it is written, we easily get the general sense.

4. THE PATTERN OF THE TRUTH

In this study we are not endeavouring to interpret the book. There are many systems of interpretation, most of them dependent upon the nature of the millennial reign described in ch. 20, and the chronological placing of this in history. It is best to:-

- (a) Accept the fact that there is a millennium,
- (b) Describe it in no other terms than that within ch. 20,
- (c) Remain within this frame of reference and not be frustrated if the symbolic description cannot be made literal,
- (d) Seek the truth which lies behind this millennial description.

What then we can do with the book, is treat it as prophecy. We are permitted to trace any of the symbolic language back to similar symbols given in other parts of Scripture. Even more, all Scripture is inter-related, especially its great themes - although they should never simply be treated as thematic concepts, but the very action of God. When, then, we trace the themes of all Scripture, realising that the prophecy of the Revelation is organically part of all prophecy (eg. the key verse of Rev. 19:10 - 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'), then we can see what the book is about. In the following paragraph we seek to do this, but not as though we have interpreted the book in its details.

5. SALVATION HISTORY AND THE REVELATION PROPHECY

We will seek to touch on the themes which relate to our approach to salvation history.

(i) God, Satan, and the Conflict

The letters to the churches speak of the activity of Satan through heresy, the occult, and immorality. At the opening of the first seal (ch. 6) there is one who 'went out conquering and to conquer ...' The seven seals, when opened bring disaster upon the earth, and this is related to judgement rather than to the direct conflict with evil. Nevertheless it is related to the problem of evil. In ch. 9 evil powers emerge from the bottomless pit and infest mankind, yet mankind, when under Judgement, remains evil, and will not repent. In ch. 11 the beast which ascends from the bottomless pit makes war upon the two prophets of God, whose prophecy is so potent. Ch. 12 is the classical passage in regard to Satan's attack upon Messiah and the people of God, whilst ch. 13 speaks of the beast, another beast, and the image of the beast, all of whom oppose God and dominate man. It must be noted that such evil 'is given power', or 'allowed' to do such-and-such. In ch. 17 the authority of evil powers, human and Satanic are described, including the Scarlet Woman, Babylon. In ch. 18 Babylon, the evil-world system is judged and judgement is executed. In chs. 19-20 all evil is judged and destroyed. Hence the battle which has taken place since the temptation in Eden, is now resolved in accordance with God's plan. It cannot be other than seen that God has used evil, in order to fulfil that plan.

(ii) The Triumph of God'

This is clear from the defeat of evil, the vindication of God in His righteous judgement. The pouring out of the vials of wrath, the seals being opened, and the trumpets operating, all show that no evil lies unrequited. The principle is shown very clearly in ch. 6, where the martyrs are promised vindication (cf. Luke 18). It is amplified in chs. 18-19 where the persecuted - saints and prophets - are vindicated by God's judgement on the Babylonian system.

(iii) The Completeness of Redemption

The Slain Lamb has redeemed his people (Rev. 5:9-10), and they too can overcome Satan by the blood of the Cross (Rev. 12:10f). Time and again the book shows the saints as received by God. The Slain Lamb controls all history - for the redeemed.

(iv) The People of God

Chs. 4, 5, 7, 14, 19-21 show that in the ultimate, God's people shall not only triumph in God, but that they shall be with Him, be led to fountains of living water, and that God will dwell with them (cf. Rev. 21:1-5, Ezek. 37:27-28). One of the most fascinating passages is Rev. 21:22 - 22:5, for here the kings of the nations bring their glory into the Eternal City, and the tree of life is for the healing of the nations (cf. Gen. 49:10, Psalm 22:27-28, Rom. 1:5, 16:26). This is in conformity with what we saw previously, that God is primarily interested in the nations, and that He will have His people before Him (Ephes. 1:3ff).

(v) The Plan of God

Ch. 10:1-7 informs us that God will shortly fulfil His mystery (cf. Ephesians on 'mystery'). That is, all that He has announced to His servants, the prophets, is about to be fulfilled (cf. Luke 1:68f, Acts 3:21, cf. Luke 24:25-27, etc.).

Indeed the points we have described above, are all part of the plan of God.

(vi) The Last Things

Our next study will deal more particularly with these, but whilst all that is in the Revelation is not, by any means, only in the future, yet these things of judgement, execution of that Judgement, and the final bliss of the redeemed, and the life Of eternity, are all mentioned.

6. CONCLUSION

We can see that this book is immensely important for salvation history. Without it, so much would be suspended. Whilst other books speak very definitely of the end things, this book shows the actual progression to that time - not necessarily chronologically, but in principle. More, it shows how God is vindicated in His plan, by the outpouring of His Judgements in man's history, and the sealing off of that Judgement at the very end of time. The triumph of Christ, and the eternal life granted to the redeemed, rounds off the history of redemption so that there are no ragged ends. God is vindicated. What He planned before creation is fulfilled, and God is 'all in all'. (Cf. I Cor. 15:24-28, Rev.11: 15.)

— *STUDY FIFTEEN* —

THE END THINGS: THE PAROUSIA, JUDGEMENT, GOD'S PEOPLE

1. INTRODUCTION: THE END THINGS

We are now in a position to see that not only does God know the end from the beginning, but designs that end from the beginning. The more the two sections of the Bible are read - the OT and the NT - the more we see the unity of Scripture. In the OT 'the last days', or 'the day of the Lord' or 'that day' are spoken of. See Amos 5:18, Joel 1:15, 2:28f, 3:14, 18, Zephaniah 3:11, 16, 'Zechariah 14:9, Isaiah 2:2-4, Hosea 3:5 and many other passages. Much of what is prophesied in these passages, receives *partial* fulfilment in Christ. In the NT what is not fulfilled in and by Christ is still looked forward to, as yet to happen. In one sense what Christ does is all part of the end-things, for they were yet to be, as seen from the OT perspective. Again, commencing with Pentecost, the world is in the 'last days' anyway, and really the Gospel happenings are part of the end-time. We can say this with more confidence since Christ saw his ministry as the fulfilment of the prophecies, (Luke 24:44f) and indicated that he was still working at that fulfilment. Certainly the teaching of Acts anticipates future Judgement, although only on the basis of Christ, eg. Acts 2: 14-21, 3:21ff, 10:42, 17:30f, etc.

If, then, we see the present age as moving towards the ultimate, we will realise that Christ's action is still proceeding, and that the church is part of its fulfilling ministry. This is seen in Matthew 28:19f, I Cor. 15:24-28, Romans 8:17, I Cor. 3:9, as also in the parables of stewardship given by Christ. When we go to make disciples of all nations then Christ is with us, even to the *consummation* of the age. The last day, the day of the Lord, the day of judgement, will bring all things to finality, but the days preceding, being the last days, are of extreme importance.

2. THE PAROUSIA

The word 'parousia' means 'presence' or 'arrival' and is not so much a second coming (Heb. 9:28) as the visit of a ruler. The New Testament uses other words also, but what is sure is that Jesus the Messiah will descend to earth (I Thess. 4:16), with a 'cry of command', will be '*revealed* from heaven with his mighty angels' (II Thess. 1:7), will *come* 'with all his saints' (I Thess. 3:13, cf. Jude 14), will 'come with clouds' (Rev. 1:7, Acts 1:11), 'in the glory of the Father' (Matt. 16:27-28), and 'every eye shall see him' (Rev. 1:7). This time, whether it be at the very last moment, or the times closely preceding it, are called, variously, 'the day of the Lord' 'the day of the Lord Jesus' 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ' 'the day of Christ' 'the day of God' and 'the last day'.

The coming will be at the end of the age (cf. Matt. 24:3 and 28:20, 25: 31ff). Antichrist and evil will be destroyed (II Thess. 1:8), the righteous dead will be raised (I Cor. 15:23, cf. John 5:28-29), and the redeemed gathered to

God (II Thess. 2:1, Mark 13:27). His rule, in that day, will be recognised (I Cor. 15:24ff, Rev. 11:15, Phil. 2:9-11). His appearing will transform God's people (Phil. 3:21, I John 3:2f), and the triumph of God will be made apparent. What has to be seen, however, is that Christ is already reigning, for the NT is firm about this. His victory has caused his ascension and he is at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3, 10:12-13, Col. 3:1f, Ephes. 1:20-22, etc.). When he comes he *will only reveal what already is*. It is this kingly reign and glory which will transform the saints, and bring judgement to the evil. In fact this final act will only be to complete what he has already sealed, by the victory of the Cross, the defeat of evil, and the triumph of God.

3. THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE PAROUSIA

I Corinthians 15:24-28 is a summary of what happens between the ascension and the parousia. The defeat of evil sealed on the 'D-Day' of the Cross, will be completed at the 'V-Day' of the parousia. Between Pentecost and the parousia are the events predicted in Acts 1:8. When the Gospel has been preached to the nations - 'then shall the end come' (Matt. 24:14, cf. II Thess. 2:1ff). Concurrent with this are the pressures of evil, most of which have been seen in Revelation. Satan, 'the god of this world', will seek to retain his captives, and rule 'this present evil age (aeon)', but from his power many will be transferred to the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). The people of God will face deep hatred, persecution and pressure. The saints will have to be equipped to fight against principalities and powers - 'the world rulers of this present darkness'. This will involve 'antichrist' 'the beast' 'the second beast' 'the image of the beast', 'the son of perdition', and all such forces who will threaten or entice or seduce, sometimes with hideous strength, sometimes with seducing miracles, sometimes by appearing as beautiful as Christ himself. Not until the seals are broken, the vials poured out, and the trumpets sounded, will he appear. Passages such as Luke 24 and Matthew 24, with II Thessalonians 2, indicate that certain signs will portend the end, but yet that only the Father knows the precise time.

4. THE VERY END THINGS

These constitute death, resurrection, judgement, the Kingdom of God, the people of God, heaven and hell. Naturally enough, such subjects draw a lot of interest. What will be at the end is what motivates us now, and conditions us in our manner and modes of life. We will take these things in order as we have stated them, although many of these conclude simultaneously.

Death, often spoken of as Hades, Sheol, or the grave, is the state of those who have died. Sometimes it is pictured as a place. In the OT (cf. Psalms 86: 13, 88:12, Prov. 15:24, Job 10:22, Isa. 14:9-10) it is shown as a dark, silent, shadowy place. One is not so much alive as existing. In the NT the word Hades is sometimes used. Other times, the Gehenna which denotes the valley of burning, where rubbish was destroyed. The most we can gather, is that at the resurrection the Just shall rise to life, and the unjust to judgement (cf. John 5:21-29), but the in-between time for believers, is a state of life of a very high order (Luke 23:43, Phil. 1:23, Heb. 12:23). Others see no actual time-lapse between death and resurrection, although they agree that in this spatial realm, this time will certainly be seen to exist. II Corinthians 5 has been variously debated as to whether one immediately has a heavenly body or not, on death. Ultimately all believers will be transformed to be like Christ the Son.

Judgement. Romans 8:1 speaks of judgement as past. This accords with John 5:24. The Cross is God's judgement upon sin, and believers are, accordingly, justified. In fact those whose names have been written (from the foundation of

the world, Rev. 13:8) in the Lamb's book of life, will receive no adverse judgement. Others will receive the due penalty of their sins. This judgement is spoken of as being carried out by Christ at his coming. God is also said to be Judge. II Cor. 5:10 speaks of the judgement seat of Christ. Some make a number of judgements, but it is better not to see various judgements in time. Rather, it is when God's judgement is pronounced, which concerns each person. Believers will not be judged regarding life or death, since they will be in life, but for 'losses and rewards' - a theme very strongly taught in Scripture (II John, I Cor. 3:1ff, cf. Rev. chs. 2-3). The ultimate pronouncements will take place at the end of the age, following the coming of Christ.

Resurrection. We have seen that both the good and evil will be raised, one to everlasting life, the other to the resurrection of judgement. It is conceivable *that* both will experience the future in a bodily fashion. The lake of fire into which the evil will go, presents a horrendous picture. Much debate ensues as to whether this punishment will be for ever, and it would be difficult to prove otherwise, however appalling the idea may be (Matt. 25:31ff). Resurrection to life is pictured as a most glorious event (I Cor. 15:23ff).

The Kingdom of God. This is really the rule and reign of God - wherever, whatever. However, its fulness will only be revealed at the end of the age, when the righteousness of God will be fully revealed. In our next study we will trace its progress. However, in the ultimate, not one trace of rebellion will remain, and His Kingdom will have come (I Cor. 15:24-28, Rev. 11:15) on (the new) earth as it is in heaven. The coming of the King will seal *that* (Rev. 21:1-5, Daniel 7:14ff).

The People of God. As we have indicated, and as is apparent in Revelation chs. 21-22, the people of God will have gathered. Their numbers will be immense (Rev. 7:9-14), and each will be like 'Christ himself. Hence the Abrahamic Covenant will have reached its zenith and fulfilment. 'He will be their God, and they shall be His people.'

Heaven and Hell. *Heaven* is a subject too vast to enter into here. Nevertheless it is that state where God is King, Creator, and Father, and where He is adored by all the celestial and terrestrial creatures. He allows nothing of impurity to enter it. It is a state of joy, adoration and service. In it, places are prepared for all His elect. Both the Father and the Son reign, and the people of God are clothed in bodies of glory. They have eternal life. They are holy and without blemish before Him. They see Him face to face (Rev. 22:3).

Pain, suffering, darkness and death, with all sorrow, have been destroyed forever, (Rev. 7:9-17, 21:1-5). However, *that* heaven is a purposeful place appears from Rev. 7:15 - amongst other such hints. *Hell* and *death* seem synonymous. The three words often translated 'hell' are Sheol, Hades and Gehenna, the latter being related to suffering, and that, it would appear, of a perpetual nature. The word *tartaros* is also employed (II Peter 2:4), and is a very strong word. 'The lake of fire' (Rev. 19:20, 20:14-15, 21:8) is the depiction of the same suffering. It has been called 'the place of the finally impenitent', and always presents a difficult subject. However, Romans 1:18-32 refers to the state of a man under wrath rather than to a place, so that we should *keep state* rather than *place* in our thinking when we contemplate the concept of hell.

5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion we come to now, is that these events will perfectly seal the history which began with creation. Not one of the events is novel or bizarre. Whilst subjects like death, hell and judgement are difficult to understand, this is primarily because we ourselves are personally and subjectively involved in them. We have certain standards for 'love', and if these are not seen in the light of the holiness and wrath of God, then they will be deficient. What makes us marvel is the intricate handling of all the events of history so that at the end full justice is done, mercy is not strained, and the grace and love of God show through as powerfully as do His holiness, righteousness and truth. We say, where we do not understand, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right', and where we understand - so far as man may - 'He doeth all things well'. For the most part, we simply marvel,

'O, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His Judgements and how inscrutable His ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord,
and who has been His counsellor? For from Him,
and to Him, and through Him are all things.
To Him be glory for ever. Amen.'

— *STUDY SIXTEEN* —

REVIEW OF SALVATION HISTORY

1. INTRODUCTION

We have now come to the conclusion of our course. What we want to see now is (a) A panoramic view of this history, (b) God's modes in working it out, and (c) God's purposes in it all. We also have to understand that many factors of our fallen humanity work against true understanding of the events, purpose and action, and the primary one is that such true understanding obligates us to obedience in the entire issue.

2. PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE EVENTS OF SALVATION HISTORY

There are not two histories, one secular, the other sacred. Nor are there two histories, one the chronicled events, the other salvation history. Rightly understood, history is what God is about. It thus happens that history, truly understood, reveals the nature, person, and work of God. It is also true that it is the account of God fulfilling His own plan and purpose. This is why history, rightly understood, has its ultimate effect of glorifying God, i.e. God as He essentially is.

We have seen that creation is the key to *all God's plan*. See Ephesians 3:9 where the plan of God and creation are conjoined. The *nature of God* leads us to the *nature of man*, since man is made in the likeness of God. This then indicates *the fearful nature of the fall of man*, and explains why, this evil increasing, *the flood* was a reasonable and necessary judgement. The Flood leads us on to the occasion and *nature of universal grace* in the Noahic Covenant. Following the Flood, we see the degeneration of man, and God's grace, amidst idolatry, in establishing the *Abrahamic Covenant*, when, in fact, it was not warranted by man's obedience. It was purely of God's grace. This covenant enables us to understand that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that the latter becomes the vehicle for *the Seed, the hitherto promised Messiah*. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us neatly that the *Covert with Moses* was an intermediate covenant, to be followed and superseded by the *New Covenant* - 'the better covenant'.

Israel is enormously important, and not a mere stepping stone to the New Covenant. Since God's 'gifts and calling are without recall' (Rom. 11:29), then Israel is very important, and we will have occasion to refer to these below. The history of Israel leads to *Messiah, Jesus the incarnate Son of God*, come to effect salvation, and to redeem his people, Israel, as also 'to be a light to lighten the Gentiles'. Jesus, having effected salvation, together with his Father, sends from the throne (of reigning and authority) the *Holy Spirit*. *These are the last days*, and the Spirit is the eschatological Spirit, effecting salvation, sonship, the revealing of the Kingdom, and leading all things to the end which God has planned. The end, when it comes, is *the outworking and fulfilling of God's plan and purpose* through the power of the Cross, the guidance of the Spirit, the enablement of the Father, and the obedience of the church. The end sees all evil judged and vanquished, and *the Father with His family*, inhabiting the new heavens and the new earth.

3. THE PLACE OF ISRAEL

Theological interpretation of history has been the puzzle of innumerable scholars. Part of the problem has been the various attempts to place within a structure, the events of history. This is made more difficult because of prophecy. The language is often pictorial, symbolic, and apocalyptic, but has been taken literally, and whereas some prophecy must be taken literally, yet the simple fact of Hebraic style, poetry and imagery, has not been understood. Often Western modes of analysis, literalism, and the like has created difficulties in truly understanding the Scriptures. Many scholars feel they must be able to fit all elements into their particular frame of reference. Hence Israel is looked at on the one hand as being always the people of God, remaining so, until the very last. Others make Israel a dispensational necessity until the ascension, and then make the church 'spiritual Israel', and transfer all the prophetic promises to her. Yet others see a continuity of the people of God, leading into Israel in particular, and then on to the church, whilst including faithful Israel, thus making 'the true Israel of God' to ever be the true people of God (cf. Rom. 2:25-3:3, Gal. 6:16, Rom. 9:6-8, Phil. 3:3).

These claims can never be settled satisfactorily to everyone's satisfaction. This is why various prophetic schemes will always be before the church. Whilst the better way is to approach these problems from the point of view of the Abrahamic Covenant (and so), the New Covenant, the Kingdom of God, and the people of God, yet Israel must also be understood, and her place in God's history clearly outlined. All Christians who take the Bible for their guideline agree, generally, that Christ will return, and that there will be a judgement at the end, the saints being glorified, and the impenitent being punished, whilst Satanic evil will meet its doom. Not all agree on the events leading up to that conclusion, nor the exact nature of the End-events. This does not greatly matter.

What *we have to avoid is a deficient view of Israel*. If we read the books from Deuteronomy to Nehemiah, we can easily be deceived into taking a very low view of Israel, and even be depressed by her failure. We need to discern the *very high levels* at which the holy remnant within Israel, always understood God. The song of Moses and Miriam, the level of understanding of Joshua, the high / views of Hannah and her son Samuel, the utter brilliance of the Psalmists, and the powerful understanding of kings like David, Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah (amongst more), let alone the stunning understanding of the prophets, all warn us against taking a low view of Israel, despite her idolatry and apostasy. This then leads us to the truth that God's people have ever understood Him, and the real saints have ever been aware of His plan and purposes. The events immediately preceding Christ's birth, as also those attending it, show us great men of God like Zechariah, John the Baptist, Simeon, and great women like Mary, Elizabeth and Anna, whilst behind these a large group who were waiting for 'the consolation of Israel' References to Israel in the Book of the Revelation (cf. Rev. 7:4-8, 11:1-2, 14:1-2, 21:12) warn us against seeing this nation as a discounted entity. Romans 9-11 is a brilliant working-out of God's eternal purposes for that nation. This warns us that our reading of salvation history - whilst it must be panoramic - must also be one of discernment in depth of the modes God uses in His history.

4 THE PLACE OF PROPHECY

Time and again we are driven to see two things, concerning prophecy:

- (i) We cannot understand salvation history apart from prophecy, and,

(ii) Salvation history is not effected apart from prophecy.

In this Hebrews 1:1-2 gives us the key—'In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets: but in these last days He has spoken unto us by a Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and by whom He created the ages (worlds).' We see then that God has spoken, until the incarnation of Christ, by the prophets. Then He has spoken by the person and acts of Christ.

Let us quickly trace the prophetic thrust of history. We have seen that the first nominated prophet is Abel, that Enoch is a most significant prophet, that Noah, too, has prophetic ministry. Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Joshua effect a course of prophetic utterance and teaching. During the period of the Judges, there was prophecy, but it was rare, and rose to its zenith in Samuel. Then commenced a course of prophets, until the last nominated as Malachi. However, the people of God had two strong elements confronting them - (a) Actual prophecy, both pre-Samuel and post-Samuel, and (b) The prophetic thrust, in that all the actions of God, as also His relationships with Israel and their consequent covenant-relationship with Him, gave purpose and meaning both to blessing and cursing. Hence the 'Former Prophets' as well as 'The Latter Prophets'. When we link this prophetic ministry with the life and action of the faithful remnant within Israel, then we can see that God's operations have always been powerful, albeit they often seem hidden, and even non-existent. In order to understand the high level of the experience of God by the faithful, we need to also understand the ministry of the prophets and their word from God. Even more, we need to understand the nature of history as the Bible depicts and interprets it.

Let us also remember that whilst Christ is the prophet, his ministry must be prophetic as also salvific. The coming of Pentecost introduces a new era of prophetic ministry, even though the *prophetic deposit* is filled. The crystallisation of this deposit is given in the Book of the Revelation, but the prophetic thrust must ever go on, since 'the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy'. We can see that whatever God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, is still didactic for our age (Luke 24:26-27, 44f, etc.). It is always the key to salvation history, since all history, anyway, is prophetic.

5. THE PLAN AND GOAL OF GOD: SALVATION AND THE PURPOSE OF GOD

We come, now, to our conclusions, those which have been inherent in all our studies. At no point in all history has God ever created an expedient to meet a contingency. From before creation, He has planned His ultimate goal. Whilst Christians generally agree that it is to glorify Himself, yet even this could be seen to be beyond our comprehension, since we generally disapprove of anyone simply glorifying himself. We must see that when He glorifies Himself as Father it is because He *is* Father, and that Fatherhood is essential to man, and the ultimate nature of eternity. When He glorifies His children in the image of His Son (and so, of Himself), then it is because that was what He ever intended for man, and that is His own glory. He will be God to His people, Father to His children, Creator to His creatures, King to His subjects, whilst His Son will be Brother to his family, Son to the Father, Lord to his creation (thus incorporating all sonship in his Sonship).

We conclude then, that when He made creation and *it was very good*, so when He completes His plan, it, likewise, *will be very good*, and we will see the goodness of God. It is not simply His high transcendence which evokes the worship and adoration of the heavenly celestial beings, as well as the vast host of the redeemed, so much as it is that He has created all things, and then has redeemed them. This is what impels Paul to say, on the one hand, 'the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things ... the eternal purpose which He realised in Christ Jesus our Lord', and on the other, 'that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace towards us in Christ Jesus.' This makes us see that our sonship is (a) 'To the praise of His glorious grace', and (b) 'To the praise of His glory' (Cf. Ephesians 3:9-11, 2:7, 1:5-6, 11, 14.)

At the same time, let us never see *salvation* as merely the redemption of a person from sin, Satan, death and wrath, but let us see it is the whole cosmic operation, which, having banished evil, has achieved the unity of all things, the reconciliation of all things, the filling up of all things, the harmonising of all things. In fact, this is the true revelation of all things (cf. Ephesians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 1:23, 4:10, Colossians 3:14). This is true salvation history.

- Questions For Use In Groups Or Personal Study -

NOTE: - These questions can be used for discussion in classes and groups to review the material or to work out its meaning together. Students reading the material can use the same questions personally, either to write out answers or understand them by reviewing the text.

STUDY ONE: INTRODUCTION TO SALVATION HISTORY

- (i) What do we mean by salvation (a) In its technical sense? (b) In its general sense used in this course.
- (ii) What would you see as the real value of "(b)" (above)?
- (iii) Discuss the meaning, purpose and significance of creation in the light of salvation history.

STUDY TWO: MAN, THE FALL, AND THE FLOOD

- (i) Remembering the nature of created man what do we then understand by the term *fall*?
- (ii) What do we understand to be the results of the *fall* and how do they link in with a change of relationships between God and man?
- (iii) What was the true significance and purpose of the Flood?

STUDY THREE: BABEL AND ABRAHAM

- (i) Why the emphasis on genealogies in this section?
- (ii) What is the *Nimrod principle*? How does it work out in relation to **Babel**?
- (iii) Describe the purpose, meaning and significance of God's covenant with Abraham.

STUDY FOUR: EGYPT AND THE EXODUS'

- (i) Discuss the principle of selection (or election) especially in regard to (a) Isaac - as against Ishmael (b) Jacob - as against Esau.
- (ii) Discuss the *purpose* of (a) Israel in Egypt (b) Israel in the Exodus.
- (iii) What were the functions and ministry of Joshua?

STUDY FIVE: THE JUDGES AND SAMUEL

- (i) Describe the period of the Judges, especially that described in chapters 17 to 21. What was the main error of the people?
- (ii) In what sense can the Judges said to be *witnesses*?
- (iii) It is said, "Samuel was the first prophet-priest-king." What do you make of this statement?

STUDY SIX: ISRAEL AND THE MONARCHY

- (i) Was monarchy for Israel permitted by the Law (the Pentateuch)? If so were there conditions for such? What were they?
- (ii) Compare the monarchies of Saul and David and what significance do you see in their *persons*?
- (iii) Describe in principle the post-Davidic monarchies and what were the differences between those of the two Kingdoms?

STUDY SEVEN: ISRAEL: THE PROPHETS AND THE EXILE

- (i) Discuss the actual nature of prophecy:- (a) What did the prophet do? (b) What were the elements of his **message**.
- (ii) What was the basic message of the prophets?

STUDY EIGHT: ISRAEL, THE RETURN, THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

- (i) Trace the historic happenings of the Fall of both kingdoms - the Northern and Southern - and discuss briefly the causes.
- (ii) What was the *purpose* of the Exile, and what its *results*? Evaluate the state of the returning exiles.
- (iii) Give a precis of the Old Testament in the light of God's purposes.

STUDY NINE: GOSPEL HISTORY I - JESUS AND THE MINISTRY

- (i) Assuming that what the NT claims regarding the 'fulness of time' is true what was (a) proclaimed and (b) anticipated? Describe these elements.
- (ii) Discuss the term 'Jesus the Son-Messiah.'
- (iii) What were the basic themes and elements of Jesus' ministry in Palestine?

STUDY TEN: GOSPEL HISTORY II - JESUS AND THE END EVENTS

- (i) Having the thrust and purpose of Salvation History in mind discuss Jesus and prophecy.
- (ii) Discuss the transfiguration in its relation to the Cross.
- (iii) Discuss Israel in the light of (a) Future events (b) The Cross and Resurrection.

STUDY ELEVEN: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EARLY CHURCH - PENTECOST: JEWS, SAMARITANS AND GENTILES

- (i) What were the elements Jesus taught his disciples in his post-resurrection appearances?
- (ii) What was the nature and significance of Pentecost?
- (iii) Describe the early beginnings of the church.

STUDY TWELVE: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EARLY CHURCH - II PAUL AND THE NEW CHURCHES

Discuss the following elements:-

- (i) The person and conversion of Saul.
- (ii) The significance of Saul for the conversion of the Gentiles.
- (iii) Paul's Gospel which he preached to the Gentiles. Did it differ from that preached to the Jews by the other apostles?

STUDY THIRTEEN: THE CHURCH, THE EPISTLES, AND THE PLAN OF GOD

- (i) What was the purpose, value and context of the NT Epistles?
- (ii) What was different about the church from (a) The congregation of Israel, and (b) any other contemporary organisation?
- (iii) In what manner is God's plan and purpose for history outlined in-the NT?

**STUDY FOURTEEN: THE THINGS OF THE REVELATION:
HISTORY OUTWORKING**

- (i) What is the nature and purpose of this book?
- (ii) Discuss the following elements of the book:- The millennium, the action of evil and the Judgements of God, the ultimate vindication of God in His fulfilment of history, the plan for His people and His creation.

**STUDY FIFTEEN: THE END THINGS: THE PAROUSIA, JUDGEMENT AND
GOD'S PEOPLE**

- (i) What is the Biblical 'linear view' of history? How does it relate to the 'end things'?
- (ii) Discuss the Parousia, i.e. its meaning, purpose and action.
- (iii) What are the end things? Why are they after the manner described in the Scriptures?

STUDY SIXTEEN: REVIEW OF SALVATION HISTORY

Write an essay on salvation history,

or

Discuss salvation history in the light of pre-Abrahamic history, the covenant, Israel, prophecy and the church.